Evaluation of Schools as Zones of Peace
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The views and interpretation listed in this report are the authors’ and do not necessarily reflect those of Save the Children.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary ......................................................................................................................... 4
Abbreviations and Acronyms .......................................................................................................... 7

Chapter 1. Introduction & Methods ............................................................................................... 9
  Scope of the Evaluation .................................................................................................................. 10
  Methodology .................................................................................................................................. 11
  Background .................................................................................................................................... 13
  The Problem ................................................................................................................................... 13
  Building Global Momentum for Revitalized SZOP Projects ......................................................... 14
  What is SZOP? ............................................................................................................................... 16
  Activities for Current Projects ...................................................................................................... 18

Chapter 2. Context Overview ......................................................................................................... 19
  Overview: Occupied Palestinian Territories .................................................................................. 19
  Threats to Children and Education in oPt ..................................................................................... 20
  Contextualizing SZOP for an Interstate Protracted Conflict .......................................................... 20
  Overview: The Democratic Republic of the Congo ....................................................................... 21
  Threats to Children and Education in DRC .................................................................................. 22
  Contextualizing the SZOP framework for DRC ........................................................................... 23

Chapter 3. Findings .......................................................................................................................... 24
  Schools as Zones of Peace: Comparing Data Across Cases .......................................................... 24
  School & Community Level Engagement ...................................................................................... 24
    1. Establishing a central coordination mechanism ....................................................................... 25
    2. Addressing psychological protection and youth empowerment .............................................. 29
    3. Strengthening Reporting of Violations .................................................................................... 33
    4. Overcoming Challenges of Engaging Duty-Bearers ................................................................. 38
  National Level Engagement .......................................................................................................... 40
    1. Resource Allocation ................................................................................................................. 40
    2. Coordination of partners ......................................................................................................... 42
    3. Advocating for policy change .................................................................................................. 44

Chapter 4. Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 47
  Summary of relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability .............................................................. 47
  Intended effects of the project ....................................................................................................... 49
  Recommendations at the global level ............................................................................................ 50
  Considerations ............................................................................................................................... 53

Annexes ........................................................................................................................................... 57
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annex</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annex 1</td>
<td>Case Studies</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex 2</td>
<td>Inception Report</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex 3</td>
<td>Terms of Reference</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex 4</td>
<td>People Interviewed</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive Summary

Around the world children are routinely denied access to education leaving negative impacts on both individuals and society. Particularly in situations of armed conflict, children encounter overwhelming obstacles to fulfilling their right to education. Physical and psychological violence are often pervasive, resulting in fear and low confidence for reaching and remaining in school safely.

The Safe Schools Declaration of 2015 has been a critical first step to addressing this issue—countries around the world have declared firm political commitments for protecting education from attack. The declaration is a first of its kind and describes the immediate and long-term consequences of attacks on students, teachers, schools, and universities, as well as the military use of educational facilities during periods of armed conflict. It contrasts this with the positive and protective role that education is intended to take. To ensure promises made towards the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) can turn into action, Save the Children has put forth the Schools of Zones of Peace (SZOP) project as a practical method to operationalize the declaration and offer concrete measures to move forward.

The intent of this report was to learn from current Schools as Zones of Peace project implementation. The main purpose of the evaluation was to assess and document results of the SZOP project so far and provide lessons learned and recommendations for future work, including guidance for dissemination and scaling up of the project with other organisations and global partners. This report was an external evaluation commissioned by Save the Children Norway for the project period occurring between 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2017.

Specifically, the scope of the research was to present findings across two cases of the SZOP project in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with discussion of potential global linkages valuable for further dissemination. These projects were piloted after the SZOP model was adapted to meet the goals of the Safe Schools Declaration and it was anticipated they would shed insights on how the project could be contextualized in diverse conflict scenarios. Ultimately, learning from all pilot countries is envisaged to inform global guidance for the SZOP project so that countries can meet commitments made towards the SSD and all children may access safe and protective learning environments.

The report consists of background on the global movement to protect education from attack and evolution of the SZOP project over time. This overview is offered as rationale for current SZOP project development. Subsequently, the report presents information drawn from case studies in oPt and DRC to exemplify contextualization processes. This section gives a description of activities across both countries and offers discussion of the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of efforts. Lastly, the report concludes with a summary of previous sections, recommendations aimed at enriching a global approach, unintended consequences, and broad considerations moving forward.

The methods of evaluation included desk review of previous and current projects and in-country data collection with selected stakeholder groups. In total 181 participants across ten schools in oPt and DRC offered critical insights, which included nearly 40% youth representation. Data was collected through interviews, focus groups,
and observations and findings were garnered by developing unique case studies in the first phase of analysis followed by a comparative case study approach.

**Findings**

Activities in each context were analysed according to relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability. Across oPt and DRC some common issues have emerged. To encompass both contexts, these findings are presented broadly here and covered in more detail in the report. Overall, the report concludes the following:

**Relevance:**
- Based on the context of each country, priorities were identified and resources were allocated.
- When designing the activities, each country weighed the benefits of new vs. existing structures.
- Activities were child-centered, but not child-driven.
- SZOP in each country sought diverse avenues for material support.

**Effectiveness:**
- Disaster risk management has produced protocols and coordinated responses.
- Coordinating committees were extremely well informed but the community remained unknowledgeable on SZOP goals/activities.
- Diverse channels for reporting violations have been in place but challenges in what and whether to report continue.
- Slow and steady progress has been made engaging duty bearers in DRC.

**Sustainability:**
- Without continued project implementation, ANSAs may regress into old practices.
- Without strong confidence in the program or measures of progress on the ground, school communities may not sustain new practices introduced by SZOP.
- Policy formation has been a critical point of sustainability.

**Recommendations**

During cross case analysis of oPt and DRC, activities were grouped according to common themes. These themes were identified by the research team yet represent the broad targets that schools, communities, local partners, and Save the Children identified at the country level as areas for intervention. The full report describes in detail how each country worked towards these targets. Subsequent analysis of the work produced recommendations for further dissemination, which is presented as follows.

**Theme: Establishing a central coordination mechanism**
- Increasing child participation in the planning and coordinating of activities
- Creating community dissemination strategies such as engaging “journalist groups” or identifying “gatekeepers” of information for participation in the project
- Establishing measures of progress at the school level to maintain investment
Theme: Addressing psychological protection and youth empowerment

- Gender sensitive programming
- Creating dissemination strategies among children to share out knowledge learned by those selected for participation with the wider student population

Theme: Strengthening reporting of violations

- Addressing what constitutes an “attack” is still needed among many stakeholder groups due to the complex nature of the conflicts
- Ensuring anonymity of reporting needs to be affirmed among local populations to remedy fears of retribution

Theme: Overcoming challenges of engaging duty-bearers

- Seeking local partners in DRC to engage with ANSAs will improve sustainability of the project (if possible)
- Investigating potential for local partners in oPt, such as liberal Israeli NGOs, is worthwhile to probe

Theme: Resource allocation

- Extending the zone of peace to protect against threats occurring both on and off school grounds, with appropriate resources allocated (examples may include buses to protect children off school grounds, school gates to protect children on school grounds)
- Linking SZOP with other programs to utilize hard resources not always available via the SZOP project

Theme: Coordination of partners

- Engaging the Child Protection sub-cluster to expand network of support

Theme: Advocating for policy change

- Providing a planning framework to give detailed guidance to MOEs for strengthening or establishing suitable policy
### Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANSA</td>
<td>Armed Non-State Actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APCLS</td>
<td>Alliance des Patriotes pour un Congo Libre et Souverain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community-Based Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Children’s Club</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNDP</td>
<td>The National Congress for the Defense of the People</td>
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<tr>
<td>CoC</td>
<td>Code of Conduct</td>
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<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Child Protection</td>
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<td>CR</td>
<td>Child Resilience</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRG</td>
<td>Child Rights Governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>Conflict Sensitive Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CTFMR</td>
<td>Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting</td>
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<td>CZOP</td>
<td>Children as Zones of Peace</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCO</td>
<td>District Coordination Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>The Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECHO</td>
<td>European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations</td>
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<tr>
<td>EiE</td>
<td>Education in Emergency</td>
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<tr>
<td>FARDC</td>
<td>Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>FFU</td>
<td>Field Follow Up unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>GC</td>
<td>Geneva Call</td>
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<td>GCPEA</td>
<td>Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTTC</td>
<td>Groupe de Travail Technique Conjoint</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDF</td>
<td>Israel Defense Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
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<tr>
<td>IHL</td>
<td>International Humanitarian Law</td>
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<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>Listening Point</td>
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<tr>
<td>M23</td>
<td>March 23 Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEAL</td>
<td>Monitoring, Evaluation Accountability and Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEHE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Higher Education (referring to oPt)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIS</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior and Security</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOD</td>
<td>Ministry of Defense</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education (referring to DRC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Name</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>MONUSCO</td>
<td>United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC</td>
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<td>MRM</td>
<td>Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRC</td>
<td>Norwegian Refugee Council</td>
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<td>oPt</td>
<td>The occupied Palestinian territories</td>
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<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Palestinian Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNC</td>
<td>Congolese National Police</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNGO</td>
<td>Partner NGO</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTA</td>
<td>Parent Teacher Association</td>
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<td>SDMC</td>
<td>School Disaster Management Committees</td>
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<td>SSD</td>
<td>Safe Schools Declaration</td>
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<td>SZOP</td>
<td>Schools as Zones of Peace</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOC</td>
<td>Theory of Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>The United Nations Children's Fund</td>
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<td>UNSG</td>
<td>United Nations Secretary-General</td>
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Chapter I: Introduction & Methods

The Schools as Zones of Peace (SZOP) project is a Save the Children led initiative aimed at strengthening the knowledge and actions necessary to protect schools from attack while also ensuring continuity in education during periods of conflict. It is intended for use in fragile contexts or anywhere that education is regularly disrupted due to military use of buildings, detentions, forced recruitment, or attacks on schools. The model provides directives and activities at multiple levels of engagement (local, community, and national) to strengthen educational networks and increase measures of protection. SZOP was developed in the early 2000s but revitalized and adapted in recent years to provide a practical method to meet the goals of the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD).

Efforts to revitalize SZOP were initiated as global momentum for protecting education grew into firm political commitments when countries began signing the SSD. Established in 2015, the SSD is an intergovernmental agreement led by Norway and Argentina to affirm the right of all children to safe and uninterrupted education. The declaration recognizes that “the impact of armed conflict on education presents urgent humanitarian, development and wider social challenges. Worldwide, schools and universities have been bombed, shelled and burned, and children, students, teachers and academics have been killed, maimed, abducted or arbitrarily detained”. The SSD affirms education is fundamental to development and the full enjoyment of human rights and freedoms. It was opened for endorsement at the Oslo Conference on Safe Schools on May 29, 2015, at which time 37 countries signed their immediate support. Since then that number has risen to 68 countries, including many affected by armed conflict.

Over the last two years, countries have declared their commitments for protecting education from attack but further guidance has been required as to how those commitments could turn into action. The SSD has been effective in encouraging commitments by national authorities, however statements of support are not a guarantee of results on the ground. The SSD has been a valuable first step, but often only an entry point to advancing progress for children and schools.

The need for resources and tools to operationalize the SSD was anticipated at the inception of the declaration and would be an ongoing and complex task. Diverse contexts, conflicts, and stakeholder groups require a wide range of support that continues to be built. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) has provided significant support in this area. Resources have been developed to offer countries examples of how they can reach the goals of the SSD. Guidance offered by the GCPEA has primarily targeted national authorities and as such a need to assist NGOs working at the school level has also emerged.

Save the Children is working to provide additional support in this area by developing SZOP as a project that can be easily adopted by other education partners including both government authorities and NGOs. Since countries that have signed the SSD are not bound by international mechanisms that could convey sanctions for inaction or failure to produce results, it is intended that NGOS help remedy these gaps in accountability through project-based work and involvement in local educational networks. Support from NGOs is valuable for ensuring concrete steps are taken to strengthen school security and protection of education. Working with government authorities is also an important part of the SZOP project to ensure work at the school and national levels are linked to maximize results.

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The SZOP project is an instrument to bridge national, community and school levels. Simultaneously, bottom-up and top-down implementation organizes school communities towards project goals while engaging national authorities and building constituencies for protecting education from attack.

Since 2015, the revitalized SZOP project has been introduced in multiple pilot countries. These countries include the occupied Palestinian territories, Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, South Sudan, Ukraine, and Syria. The goal has been to implement the project across diverse contexts and conflicts to understand how it can be contextualized as well as gain insights into transnational comparisons and the potential for global scale up.

Through a partnership between Save the Children Norway and European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have received support to pilot an adapted version of SZOP, taking into account the development of the Safe Schools Declaration. The project was funded by ECHO and the Norwegian MFA, and ran from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2017. The budget was approximately 950,000 EUR. At the conclusion of the pilot phase, there was an expectation to use the learning gained from these two projects to inform and enrich both existing and future work, while expanding to new countries to build a stronger evidence base for the approach.

Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation covered the project period (1 July 2015 to 30 June 2017) and included fieldwork in two of the pilot countries, the occupied Palestinian territories and Democratic Republic of Congo. The scope of the research was to understand how SZOP was operationalized in these two countries, with an analysis of themes across contexts and an assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of project activities. The purpose of the evaluation was to learn from current implementation and to document results of the SZOP project so far, including any unintended effects. The evaluation also provides lessons learned and recommendations for future work, including dissemination/scaling up strategies with other organizations and global partners.

The selections of oPt and DRC as case studies provided two unique scenarios to represent how the SZOP project could be contextualized. Both countries are afflicted by ongoing conflicts where schools are consistently the target of attacks. However, the nature of the conflicts and context-specific features inevitably precipitated varied project designs and considerations for implementation. Together they display how two distinctly different contexts are working towards similar goals of security for children and education. Drawing collectively on the activities and results in these two countries, positive practices and ongoing challenges were examined with recommendations conveyed.

As background this report provides an overview of the development and goals of the Schools as Zones of Peace project, including rationale and momentum for current implementation. Subsequently, in depth analysis on how the project has been contextualized to fit the situations in oPt and DRC is presented. The activities are organized by thematic areas (defined by the research team after cross-case analysis) and summed up with points on relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of efforts. The report concludes with a summary of previous sections, unintended consequences of the project, recommendations for a global approach, and broad considerations moving forward. The report was developed according to the objectives and guiding questions defined by Save the Children.
Objectives of Report

1. Assess and document results of the SZOP project, including any positive or negative unintended effects of the interventions
2. Make recommendations to Save the Children regarding the design and implementation of SZOP for future work

Guiding Questions

1. Relevance
   a. Were interventions designed, planned and implemented to meet the needs and interests of the affected population?
   b. To what extent have the interventions been contextualized in each of the implementing countries according to the specific conflict context, relevant national policies and strategies on protecting education from attacks?

2. Effectiveness
   a. What have been the intended results of the SZOP at country level so far measured against the objectives of the project?
   b. What factors may explain achievement and non-achievement of results?
   c. Have interventions had any likely unintended consequences, positive or negative?
   d. To what extent have experiences from the national implementation been feeding into the global work?
   e. What has been the role of child participation in achieving the results?

3. Sustainability
   a. Are interventions designed and implemented in a manner that supports longer term needs in the work on protecting education from attacks?
   b. What role do existing education and child protection coordination mechanisms (including government ministries and departments) play in facilitating activities?

Methodology

This evaluation drew upon qualitative case study methodologies and document review of prior projects. Qualitative data assisted in providing rich descriptions of project activities and outcomes. Additionally, it offered a naturalistic method of inquiry that enabled the research team to represent data according to the views and perceptions of participants.

4 The initial research design utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches but ultimately the quantitative data could not be included due to weaknesses in validity.
A case study approach was taken to accommodate the disparities between culture, politics, and conflict dynamics in each country. To represent the unique situations in oPt and DRC, each context was first viewed and presented as a distinct case (see Annex 1). Subsequently, data across cases were compared to provide insights into potential global linkages.

**Qualitative Study Setting and Data Collection:** The research began with a review of project documents and progress reports from earlier countries to implement SZOP. These projects occurred prior to the Safe Schools Declaration and revisions to the current model but yielded insights on how the project was contextualized across diverse conflict scenarios. This information was used in the development of data collection tools and was reflected upon for analysis of transnational issues.

Fieldwork for in-country data collection commenced in early May 2017 and was completed in June 2017. In each country, the research team spent six days visiting schools, partner NGOs, and Save the Children field offices. In total, five schools were visited in oPt and five were visited in DRC. At each school, focus groups and interviews were conducted with a variety of stakeholders that included: students, teachers, parents/community members, and principals. Interviews were also held with SC and partner NGO staff when possible. Lastly, Skype interviews with key informants, such as a representative of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, were conducted remotely.

**Procedures and Analysis:** At the end of each day of data collection field notes were consolidated and reviewed. To ensure the integrity of the data, the researchers checked for accuracy of the field notes with translators during debrief sessions. In addition, recorded interviews were reviewed to address missing gaps in information. An inductive process of coding was implemented in the first cycle of analysis to look for areas where participants identified the project to be relevant, effective, limiting, and/or challenging. The second cycle of coding involved a deductive approach, which examined the core structure of SZOP such as the nature of the conflict, contextualization process, multilevel engagement, monitoring and reporting system, etc. These deductive codes later provided basis for comparison between the two countries to draw on global linkages. The original research questions were adapted to fit the work. Since there was not a robust list of outcomes to measure such things as “effectiveness” at the start of the project, the research team looked to how local communities perceived the project and reflected accordingly.

**Limitations:** Although the evaluation achieved its aims, there were some unavoidable limitations. First, the qualitative data is limited by an unequal gender ratio. In oPt, women were less likely to make the walk to school for focus groups given the security situation and demands of home life. In DRC, not only was female participation low but men also interrupted their responses during sessions with the research team. As such, the perspectives may not be entirely balanced.

Language was also a primary limiting factor. The research team did not speak the local languages and relied on
translation support. Consequently, inferences regarding some data may have been lost due to the nuances and subtleties of language that are often not conveyed during rapid translation. More broadly, in total only ten schools were visited although many more were active in the project. In addition, the sites visited in oPt were selected as the most vulnerable schools and sites in DRC selected based on the security of the research team. Therefore, it remains unclear to the extent these schools are fully representative of the entirety of the project since selection was not random. Nonetheless, common themes emerged and conclusions were capable of being drawn.

Lastly, comparing data across contexts proved challenging for many reasons. Foremost, visa issues impeded access to each country. The team leader was delayed permission to enter DRC and was not able to be present for data collection. Additionally, the other researcher was not able to attain a visa to Israel in order to visit oPt. Therefore, only one member of the research team was present in each country for data collection. Ultimately, this weakened analysis of the data because each researcher had primary knowledge of only one context. Consequently, comparing data across oPt and DRC was limited. Had logistical issues been improved, conclusions may be stronger.

### By The Numbers

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>oPt</th>
<th>DRC</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Schools Visited</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Child Participants</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Female Child Participants</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Male Child Participants</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Adult Participants</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Female Adult Participants</strong></td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Male Adult Participants</strong></td>
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<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Number of Female Participants</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Number of Male Participants</strong></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Participants</strong></td>
<td>88</td>
<td>93</td>
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### Background

#### The Problem

Education is a fundamental human right, but around the world schools continue to come under attack and children are denied consistent access to education. It is estimated that nearly 60 million children are out of school worldwide and approximately half live in conflict-affected countries. Between 2009-2013, attacks on schools were reported in 70 countries resulting in the deaths of students and teachers, damage to educational infrastructure, occupation of schools by armed groups, lingering trauma of affected communities, and the disruption of education for many of the world’s most vulnerable children.

The consistent denial of education for children in crisis environments results in negative short and long term impacts. In an immediate sense, it can weaken rights and children’s access to vital care. In the long term, the absence of education can lead to inadequate community development and repeated cycles of conflict. Yet when schooling is provided in safe environments that are exempt from the effects of conflict, it can normalize routines for children and assist in mitigating trauma and the impacts of war. Schooling also contributes to future peace by conveying key skills and knowledge to the next generation. Continuing education for children living in conflict environments is a crucial step for addressing immediate needs, supporting human rights, and ensuring the potential for future stability.

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5 Retrieved from UNESCO UIS website: uis.unesco.org
The value of protecting education from attack has been made evident by international agreements like the SSD and efforts of the United Nations (U.N.), but work on the ground continues to need support. At the global level, the security of schools has been emphasized by the U.N. through the development of reporting mechanisms and efforts to classify violations against children.

Specifically attacks against schools are recognized among the six grave violations committed against children in armed conflict by the UN Secretary General. In efforts aimed at accountability, the UN-led Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict (MRM) has been introduced to multiple countries with a mandate to monitor attacks on schools, teachers, and students, as well as military use of school buildings. The MRM database is managed by a Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR), which is co-chaired by the highest UN authority in country. The CTFMR is also responsible for entering into dialogue with parties to conflict, both armed forces and armed groups, to halt and prevent grave violations against children.

MRM reporting is one avenue to provoke accountability of perpetrators and elicits direct action aimed at ending violations. However, monitoring and reporting systems are often non-existent, weak or not linked to appropriate response mechanisms. Gathering reliable information in conflict-affected areas can be exceedingly difficult, due to security threats and poor infrastructure. As noted by GCPEA, 'Those with the greatest access to information or responsibility to monitor may lack skills, resources, or motivation to monitor, or may face serious security threats to their own safety or that of witnesses.' The MRM is a vital advocacy and accountability tool at the international level but relies heavily on local voices. For action to occur, communities must transfer information from schools to international forums but are often limited in their capacity to accomplish this.

It is clear that at the global level mechanisms are being strengthened to protect education but in many countries, immediate and practical interventions are still needed to strengthen school security locally. This may include efforts to build up local capacity to contribute to the MRM in addition to the development of disaster risk reduction plans, crisis management training, and establishing networks of support. Strengthening responses to violations at the local level is essential to improving the security of schools and calls for bottom-up strategies to meet global goals.

Schools as Zones of Peace seeks to offer support in this area. Implementing practical school based interventions is a foremost component to the project. SZOP recognizes that top down approaches have been vital in creating frameworks to understand the gravity of the situation and to advocate for countries to affirm child rights, but bottom up measures are also essential in countering direct threats to education occurring worldwide.

Building Global Momentum For Revitalized SZOP Projects

Over the last few decades, improving security for children and schools has become a global priority with intensified interest in recent years. In the 1980s, the concept of “children as zones of peace” (CZOP) first emerged as an imperative for improving child rights and global development. The term was initially introduced in a proposal to UNICEF by Nils Thedin, a member of UNICEF’s Executive Board who asserted that all children

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8 This is taken from the ECHO proposal for Schools as Zones of Peace: Operationalizing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict, submitted by SCN 2015.
should be protected from harm and provided with essential services to ensure their survival and well-being. It was later cited in UNICEF’s (1996) groundbreaking report, the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. UNICEF’s report exposed the grave situation for multitudes of children around the world and set forth a call to action to provide greater measures of child protection.

The claim that children must be exempt from conflict was met with global support. Over the last two decades, a growing amount of policies and programs have been instituted to provide critical care and attention for children in crisis environments. Particularly, the role of education in emergency contexts has been put forward as a valuable outlet to addressing the needs of conflict-affected youth. Yet, like children, education continues to be threatened by the effects of conflict and remains inaccessible for many.

In the early 2000s, the civil war in Nepal exemplified the challenges of ensuring access to safe educational environments. Although Nepal had ratified the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and the Optional Protocol on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, these endorsements did not protect children from the decade-long Maoist insurgency, which lasted until a peace accord was signed in 2006. To address this issue, a campaign was launched by civil society organizations and led by Save the Children under the name “Schools as Zones of Peace.” The work resulted in convincing various parties to the conflict to protect education through moral imperatives and providing children and schools with psychological and material supports. The situation in Nepal represented the challenges faced in many countries regarding education and armed conflict.

By the mid-2000s, exposure of threats to education was made prominent with the publication of UNESCO’s report, Education Under Attack (2007). The report helped to change the notion that schools were simply collateral damage in a conflict, to a more thorough understanding that schools are also frequently the target of attacks. The report identified gaps in knowledge regarding the triggers of school directed violence, effective interventions for protecting schools, and coordinated prevention and response strategies. Concepts displayed in the report were further developed at the 2009 UNESCO convened seminar, Protecting Education from Attack, which strengthened the commitments of global actors to take action for children. A follow up to Education under Attack was completed in 2010.

More than two decades of growing momentum have coalesced into collaborative networks and harmonized strategies aimed to better protect children and schools. Specifically, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) has propelled efforts in this area. GCPEA research has shown a series of attacks on schools occurring in at least 21 countries experiencing armed conflict and insecurity since 2013. It also finds that in the same period armed forces and armed groups have used schools and universities for military purposes such as bases, barracks, firing positions, armories, and detention centers in at least 24 countries experiencing armed conflict around the world. By potentially turning schools into military targets, this practice not only hinders access to education but can endanger students’ and teachers’ lives.

In 2014, the GCPEA launched The Guidelines on Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During...
Armed Conflict\textsuperscript{15} (hereby the Guidelines). This initiative aimed to reduce the use of educational facilities by armed groups and to minimize the impact of conflict on students. The Guidelines have been a vital step in the movement to protect education from attack and became a valuable component to the Safe Schools Declaration\textsuperscript{16} launched in 2015.

In the same year as the inception of the Guidelines, a SZOP project was launched in Afghanistan. Occurring prior to creation of the SSD, the project had yet to be connected to global commitments protecting the right to education. The project drew upon many of the practices used in Nepal but gave greater attention to developing a support network, incorporating journalists and media, and strengthening gender parity in education. The introduction of SZOP in Afghanistan was an early attempt to use it as a global initiative and displayed how the project could be contextualized across country boundaries. Within a close timeframe, SZOP projects in Cote d’Ivoire (2013) and Liberia (2013) also provided insights.

In the era prior to the Safe Schools Declaration, momentum was building for a revitalized SZOP project. Over the course of multiple decades, but specifically in recent years, support had built to institute policies and provide resources to protect schools from attack. At the same time, the SZOP project was consistently looked to as an effective method to strengthen school security and educational access. Successes in Nepal and Afghanistan helped SZOP to be put forth as a project, and inevitably global approach, to support the SSD. Schools as Zones of Peace, an initiative established more than a decade ago, suddenly had the potential for greater impact given new global commitments to protect children and schools from harm.

What is SZOP?

Schools as Zones of Peace is an initiative that aims to ensure the safety of children in schools and avoids the disruption of educational activities due to conflict. It is one approach to protect the rights of children to access safe learning environments in crisis-affected areas. Schools are particularly important spaces for strengthening measures of child protection and development given the number of hours children are in school and the central nature of schools within communities.

As violence and armed conflicts continue to harm vast amounts children worldwide and restrict their access to education, practical measures are necessary to promote and operationalize ‘peace’. To accomplish this, Save the Children has developed the Schools as Zones of Peace project. It encompasses core objectives and strategies that have been applied transnationally with a high degree of effectiveness and continue to have potential for success in new environments.

The core strategy of the project aims to engage diverse stakeholders at multiple levels to work towards a common goal of protecting children and schools. Gaining investment from a hierarchy of partners is important for achieving sustainable progress. This integrated web of support helps to ensure project activities do not break down and strengthens mechanisms for child protection.

The SZOP Theory of Change can be defined as follows: 

\textbf{If} schools successfully adapt and utilize the Schools of Zones of Peace project, 
\textbf{then} local, national, and global actors will engage to strengthen the physical protection of schools, prevent co-option of schools by armed groups, and improve the knowledge and awareness of

\textsuperscript{15}Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict. Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2014

\textsuperscript{16}Based on the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack website: www.protectingeducation.org
children and communities regarding child rights and protection. This will lead to ensuring children are not harmed by conflict and enable them to continue education without disruption.

At the school and community levels, SZOP strives to secure protective learning environments and raise awareness among communities, school management and children. This is accomplished through an array of activities that vary by context. Primary aims at the school and community level are to: 1. Build capacity to prevent, respond to, and mitigate threats to education, 2. Take a child centered approach focused on developing resilience, confidence, and leadership among students, and 3. Link the local level with national and international level resources and support. Since local community members are often the first line of response in a crisis, capacity building is an essential first step.

At the national level, key stakeholders, Ministries, and other partners are engaged to contextualize the guidelines and increase advocacy to promote long-term change. This process begins with a legal review of national frameworks and mechanisms to protect children and education. Findings from the legal review help to address gaps in protection efforts. Further steps may include working with government officials to infuse SZOP principles into relevant military doctrines, national laws, and administrative orders to establish comprehensive policies to protect education from attack. Coordination of resources and partners, such as the education cluster, is also a key focus. Schools may need material support to strengthen security and assistance from government ministries and education partners plays an important role. Policy change, coordination, and advocacy are central aims of SZOP activities at the national level.

Early models of the SZOP project consolidated action to the school, community, and national levels; however, increasingly the international community has been engaged for support. At the international level, advocacy is a core objective. As violations to education are reported and information flows from schools to national ministries, these reports are verified and shared with international partners (via education clusters or other constituencies) who may be influential in creating long-term change. Work at this level is a new piece of the SZOP project, consequently avenues of sharing are underdeveloped but potential for progress has been identified.

The strategy to engage stakeholders at the school, community, national, and international levels creates a comprehensive response. It is both a top down and bottom up approach and strengthens responses as well as proactive measures to protect education from attack. The multi-level engagement model is a defining feature of the SZOP project across contexts.

One challenging component to the overall SZOP project has been generating appropriate measures of progress. According to current project implementation, only three indicators have been defined: 1) At least 75% of key education and protection stakeholders participating in the action report improved monitoring of and response to attacks against education as a result of the action, 2) # of countries where guidelines have been contextualised and monitoring mechanisms have been implemented, 3) % Decrease in number of school days lost. The lack of concrete and applicable outcomes/ indicators of progress makes assessing project success difficult and further guidance is needed in this area.

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Activities for Current Projects

As the SZOP project has been introduced into diverse contexts, activities have been tailored to meet the needs of the environment. Due to this, the SZOP project has looked different when comparing earlier to later models and among the six countries currently piloting projects. For the purposes of this report, the following provides broadly the activities intended to occur in oPt and DRC. They are further elaborated upon in the findings section.

**Advocacy and Awareness Raising:** Efforts have aimed to increase awareness about protection issues in education and the Guidelines in particular, at the national and local level. At local level, awareness raising has targeted communities, local government, ANSAs, child protection networks, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and children. Efforts have aimed to increase communities’ understanding of risks to children in the education environment, as well as the principles behind the guidelines. At national level, work has been undertaken with the education cluster and the Ministry of Education (MOE) to publicize the guidelines widely.

**Mapping Protection Issues for Education:** Baseline assessments have mapped out specific protection issues at the school level and contextualized these within the framework of existing policy, response mechanisms and stakeholders, and identified gaps in protection of children in the school environment. In addition, collaborations have occurred with children, child protection committees, PTAs and community protection groups to conduct school level risk mapping and mitigation planning.

**Contextualizing the Guidelines:** The process of risk mapping has informed the contextualization of the Guidelines. The contextualization was completed by conducting a legal review of the current legislation in place, and then working with relevant stakeholders to advocate for the necessary changes.

**Developing and Strengthening Monitoring, Reporting and Referral Mechanisms:** In parallel with the contextualization process, Save the Children worked with the Ministry of Education, Education Cluster and Child Protection (CP) Sub-Cluster in each country building on and reinforcing referral networks for attacks against education. Stakeholders were engaged to decide where the process sits (e.g. with the Ministry or additional capacity for information management through the cluster) and how it can best be linked to the MRM.

**Reinforcing Protection Mechanisms for Children in Schools:** Key partners such as CP Networks, PTAs, Community leaders and children were engaged to review key protection issues raised in the risk mapping and identify ways to address these issues. Potential activities included, training community members in CP and referral networks, developing school contingency plans or making the school environment itself safer by directly addressing hazards on the way to school or in the classroom. In addition, codes of conduct were established, and signed by teachers, community leaders and posted publicly.

**Direct action with ANSAs to protect education:** In DRC, Geneva Call, a partner NGO, worked with armed non-state actors (ANSAs) to open dialogue around protection of schools and children. The aim has been to develop action plans to enforce positive obligations for better access to education in ANSA controlled areas.

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18 Taken from ECHO project proposal: Schools as Zones of Peace: Operationalizing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict.
Chapter II: Context Overview

Attacks on education regularly occur in many countries around the world and each country represents a unique situation of conflict, politics and governance, cultural factors, and threats to education. With regards to SZOP, conflict-related factors have driven the work in each implementing country and as such, a context overview is helpful to situate the description and analysis of activities found in this report. With this in mind, this section provides a brief overview of the occupied Palestinian territories and Democratic Republic of Congo. The overview conveys background for the work occurring in each country and more broadly, the diversity of conditions where SZOP projects unfold.

Overview: Occupied Palestinian Territories

For half a century Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank including East Jerusalem have been subject to the occupation of Israeli forces. Since 1967, the occupation has produced recurrent conflict and periods of extreme violence. For children, the situation is especially damaging. Their rights, including the right to education, are consistently violated as they endure armed conflict, military incursions, and physical and psychological violence.

Attention to child rights in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) has grown in recent years. According to UNICEF (2010), occupation policies and practices actively increase the vulnerability of children to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. In 2013, the U.N. published a report on the situation of military detention of Palestinian children by Israeli forces and called for greater compliance with international standards of protection. Violations to rights have been increasingly exposed but progress for children has remained slow without practical interventions and measures of accountability.

Particularly, the right to education has been consistently undermined. An array of threats impedes Palestinian children’s ability to reach and remain in school safely. These threats impact physical and psychological wellbeing as well as deteriorate confidence for making it to school unharmed. In the period prior to the introduction of SZOP in oPt, data provided by the Israel/oPt Working Group on Grave Violations against Children (which monitors, verifies and documents incidents of grave violations against children and provides information to a variety of partners including the Education Cluster), documented 321 incidents of attacks on schools across the whole of the oPt in 2012 alone. The following year in 2013, Save the Children conducted a baseline study where it was found that 37% of interviewed students in oPt felt unsafe in their school and/or on their commute. When accessing education, Palestinian children encounter myriad obstacles that put their security at risk and weaken confidence for getting to school safely.

“Sometimes we see soldiers or settlers on our walk to school. When we see them on the path we turn around and run home. We want to go to school, but we don’t want to get detained or hurt trying to get there.” – Student in Ramallah, oPt

In 2015, the Palestinian Authority (PA) signed the Safe Schools Declaration to affirm their commitments to

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22 Taken from the Israel/oPt Education Cluster website: https://educationcluster.net/?get=002154%7C2014/12/Protecting-Education-2013-08-13.pdf
23 Taken from the application for: oPt- Save the Children 2014-2017, Schools as Zones of Peace & Child Rights at the Center
Protecting education from attack. Recognizing that progress must be made to ensure children the right to safe learning environments, it was a step towards enacting change. Alternatively, Israel has yet to sign the declaration and continues to be the primary duty bearer of violations against schools. This has been a major obstacle to achieving the goals of the SSD, and although progress has been made, it remains an inhibiting factor of success.

**Threats to Children and Education in oPt**

In the early stages of the SZOP project, communities mapped risks to education. Mapping risks assisted in guiding project activities. These risks displayed the core challenges faced by schools and provided targets for intervention by the SZOP project. During focus group discussions, participants recounted the mapping activity to display the scope of the problem.

To understand the threats to education, three categories help to organize the responses of school community members. *Threats occurring on school grounds* include external factors of military and settler intrusions, vandalism, and tear gas attacks. Additionally, internal threats exist such as poor infrastructure, natural hazards, and schools are not equipped with adequate support systems that include counselors or health teams. *Threats occurring off school grounds* (typically en route to and from school) include military detention, harassment, and physical violence. Lastly, *factors that increase threats* to safety and educational access include area C restrictions, distance travelled between school and home, and insufficient school facilities that cause students to leave school grounds to meet basic needs (sanitation, nutrition, etc.).

Organizing threats to children and education in this manner is valuable as it foremost challenges the notion of what constitutes a “zone of peace”. Establishing an understanding that a vast amount of violations occur both on and off school grounds opens the opportunity to consider expanding the “zone” beyond school walls. Additionally, identifying factors that increase threats assists in developing more comprehensive preventative measures.

Overall, threats to child safety and educational access are overwhelming for many schools. Children are at constant risk of both physical and psychological harm from settlers and military forces. Coordinated efforts are needed to address these risks and without action, the security situation will remain precarious for many children.

**Contextualizing SZOP for an Interstate Protracted Conflict**

The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians presents several distinct characteristics in comparison to the other countries introduced to SZOP. Specifically, the primary duty bearer producing threats to education and child safety is a state authority engaged in military occupation. Unlike countries like Niger or DRC where perpetrators are typically armed non-state actors that remain reclusive or hidden from national authorities (government forces may also violate schools although less frequently), oPt is under wide scale military occupation by a neighbouring state. Consequently, the situation in oPt has elicited unique obstacles and considerations for introduction of the SZOP project.

Foremost, the situation of an interstate conflict has precipitated greater efforts to involve the international community. Time has shown that enduring tensions between Israelis and Palestinians have made little progress without interventions by other national authorities (e.g. Oslo Accords, 1993; Road Map for Peace, 2003). Making progress towards peace has historically relied on the participation of international governments.
Consistent with this line of thinking, the SZOP project has included efforts to increase advocacy at the international level as a method to ensure progress is both achieved and sustainable. Ultimately, the advocacy campaign has aimed to pressure Israel to support the SSD and engage with the Palestinian Authority to protect schools from attack.

Behind the rationale for involving the international community is that fact that the duty-bearer of violations, Israel, is not involved in the project. According to the Guidelines, armed parties to conflict must commit to protecting schools and avoid impinging on students’ safety and education. As such, contextualizing the SZOP project to oPt has endured challenges to community investment since progress is questionable without participation from all sides of the conflict. To circumvent this issue, SZOP in oPt has focused on building the capacity of schools and students to respond to threats. Efforts to negotiate with armed groups, which has been a common approach in alternative SZOP-implementing countries, has shifted entirely to a focus on capacity building and advocacy.

Lastly, to gain investment of national authorities, the SZOP project had to find ways to align with the political narrative of the Palestinian people. Although the PA had already become a signatory to the SSD, it remained a struggle to get support of key ministry members in the initial phases of the project. Particularly, tensions with terminology on how to describe the situation in oPt became an early point of contention. The SSD is aimed at schools threatened by “armed conflict” rather than “occupation.” This problem of vernacular created discord between proponents of the project and ministry staff. Offering support for a project that reframed the occupation as armed conflict was considered an insult to the Palestinian struggle. Over the course of time, Save the Children staff was effective in conveying the fact that by international definitions, occupation is a form of armed conflict. Providing documentation on this matter and continuing to emphasize the goals of the SSD and SZOP inevitably resulted in national commitments of support for the project.

The situation in oPt has been a unique context to introduce the SZOP project. It contains distinct contextual features unseen in other programs (primarily occupation-related factors such as area C restrictions). Although oPt contrasts significantly from other implementing countries, it still adds value to the learning around the SZOP project globally. Lessons learned from oPt provide insights on alternative plans for when the duty-bearer cannot be initially engaged (e.g. focus on capacity building), strategies for coordinated advocacy campaigns, and methods of sustainability met through national policy reforms.

Despite the unique challenges in oPt, the project has been successfully introduced to many of the most vulnerable schools. Presently SZOP has been implemented in 22 schools total, 10 of which were originally supported through an ECHO award and subsequently buttressed by additional Norwegian MFA funds. These schools were selected for piloting the project since they experience some of the highest rates of violence the West Bank (SZOP has not yet been introduced to Gaza). All schools are located in area C communities and endure constant threats to child safety and wellbeing.

Overview: The Democratic Republic of the Congo

For more than two decades, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has suffered from chronic emergency conditions due to frequent outbreaks of violent conflict in its eastern region. The most recent conflict recorded was the fighting between the government of DRC and the Congolese Revolutionary Army also known as the March 23 Movement (M23) in North Kivu. M23 soldiers largely came from the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), which was a former Rwanda-backed rebel group that was later integrated into
the Congolese army\textsuperscript{24}. According to the report by United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo (2012), the Rwandan government was directly involved with M23 overseeing operational planning, sending weapons and army troops, and training new recruits in eastern Congo\textsuperscript{25}. In November 2012, M23 occupied the provincial capital Goma and the conflict spanned over a year until the peace agreement was signed in December 2013.

Bordering Rwanda, the province of North Kivu has been one of the most affected areas with ongoing reports of massacres, mass internal displacements, and grave violations against children and youth\textsuperscript{26}. The United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) has stated that this area was an "epicenter of violence"\textsuperscript{27}. In 2014, Education under Attack reported the estimation of 500 up to 999 attacks on education taking place in DRC between 2009 and 2013, which were mostly concentrated in the eastern region. According to the UNSG report on DRC in 2014, 180 schools were directly affected by the conflict between the year 2012 and 2013 with 47 of those being heavily damaged. In just 2013 alone, 95 attacks against schools were reported and there were 25 incidents of military use of schools\textsuperscript{28}.

According to the UNSG’s report\textsuperscript{29}, the provinces of North and South Kivu accounted for more than half of the internally displaced population in DRC between the years 2010 and 2013. Coupled with this are factors of extreme poverty and absence of government services that create situations where people suffer from malnutrition, chronic disease, and children are unable to attend school. Schools for example were often the first public building to be occupied by internally displaced persons (IDPs) and armed groups frequently used them as their base of operations\textsuperscript{30}. School furniture and textbooks were burned as cooking fuel and latrines were hard to maintain in hygienic condition due to use by a larger population. Even when schools were returned to their original purpose, equipment sometimes disappeared or was often destroyed. Lack of education infrastructure, absence of government funding, and a poorly adapted curriculum were also significant barriers to children’s entry and completion of education\textsuperscript{31}. According to World Bank data\textsuperscript{32}, in 2010, the primary school completion rate in DRC was 61\% with significant gender disparity (52\% for girls vs. 69\% for boys).

**Threats to Children and Education in DRC**

In addition to the occupation of schools by IDPs and armed groups, other threats surrounded children in and out of school. Consistent with the classification in the opt study, threats in eastern Congo were also organized in three categories. *Threats occurring on school grounds* include internal factors of child abuse mostly through corporal punishment given by teachers, ethnic discrimination and physical violence within peer groups, and dangerous infrastructure that is either destroyed or not properly built to meet safety standards. External factors mostly derive from the military use of schools, which is not limited to the presence of the rebel groups.

\textsuperscript{24} Retrieved from Human Rights Watch website: https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/11/20/dr-congo-us-should-urge-rwanda-end-m23-support


\textsuperscript{28} United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG). (2014). Children and Armed Conflict.


\textsuperscript{30} UNICEF. (2010). Education in Conflict and Transition Contexts: Case studies from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal and Southern Sudan. *Field Notes: UNICEF Policy and Programming in Practice. New York, UNICEF.*

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

but also includes the police and national defense forces. Threats occurring off school grounds (typically en route to and from school) include child abduction and forceful recruitment, gender-based violence and other types of physical violence, and traffic accidents on the road. Lastly, factors that increase threats to safety and educational access include diverse types of natural hazards including volcanic eruptions, thunder lightning, and kids drowning in the nearby lake. The political unrest in DRC also increases tensions on school grounds with the civil society and protesters calling for school closures and attacking classrooms when schools are in session.

**Contextualizing the SZOP framework for DRC**

Similar to how SZOP was rolled out in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), SC embarked on multi-level engagement when the project was introduced in 2015. The model was again adapted and contextualized based on the characteristics of conflicts that were unique to DRC. First of all, the conflicts were clustered around the eastern region and this called for a strong buy-in from the provincial level. The vast size of DRC and the distance between Kinshasa (national level) and Goma (provincial level) necessitated action at more levels.

Moreover, the dominant perpetrators and violators of child protection and education were ANSAs, which led SC to partner with the Swiss NGO, Geneva Call (GC). Established in 2000, GC has expertise and multiple experiences working with ANSAs under volatile circumstances such as war zones and conflict affected areas where SC may have limited access. Another aspect in DRC that merits attention was the nature of its conflict that is extremely rampant in and around the school community. That is, violence not only took place between the armed groups (ANSAs, police, and national defense forces) and civilians, but also it was evident between teachers and students, parents and children, and even amongst the peer group. Therefore the strong advocacy work on child rights, child protection, and its violation was required across all levels and all stakeholders.
Chapter III: Findings

Schools as Zones of Peace: Comparing Data Across Cases

At the outset of the current SZOP project implementation was an emphasis that strategies and activities would need to be adapted to each country context. It was recognized that varied factors of culture, politics, and conflict would necessitate different pathways to achieving enhanced security for children and schools. In efforts to move beyond “one size fits all” strategies, the project aimed to support the Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines to Protect Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict by creating country-specific interventions. This process of contextualization has been a core principle to the SZOP project.

Since 2015, pilot countries have endeavoured to contextualize and implement the revitalized SZOP project and although each has operated differently some common threads have begun to emerge. Looking forward, the SZOP project will need to continue to be adapted to specific contexts but ongoing comparison of projects helps to identify thematic areas for consideration, positive practices, and challenges consistent across countries. As part of the scope of this evaluation, projects in oPt and DRC were investigated to understand how SZOP would be contextualized in various conflict environments, probing the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of efforts. Each country conveys a unique case study (see Annex 1) but for purposes of this report cases have been compared for emergent themes across contexts and presented accordingly. Drawing out themes assists in developing a broad interpretation of how the project has been adapted across country scenarios.

Comparing data of oPt and DRC offers a starting point for discussions on developing a global approach or replicable tools, but further country data is required to strengthen findings of this report. It is envisaged by the research team that the findings presented here will continue to be compared with other country projects to enrich design and implementation of SZOP. It is recommended that additional cases feed into global development of the project, with in-depth analysis of themes occurring across multiple contexts. Although feedback from additional countries is imperative for a global approach, this two-country study, buttressed by desk review of previous work, offers a window into understanding the project transnationally.

This section presents information on projects in oPt and DRC and is organized first by level of engagement (i.e. activities occurring at the school/community, national levels) and second with thematic areas drawn out and presented within each level. Organizing activities by thematic areas is a result of cross-country comparison. The SZOP model already conveys actions typical to each level of engagement (representing what should happen in theory) but this analysis offers further insights on how activities actually unfolded, common themes that emerged, and hence, how the project was adapted in practice. Furthermore, analysis of the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of project components is provided following descriptions of each activity.

School & Community Level Engagement

Strengthening the capacity of schools to mitigate threats and minimize harm is a critical component of SZOP activities. To promote SZOP principles at the school level, multiple activities have unfolded in oPt and DRC. Each country has pursued different strategies of engagement and consequently implemented activities unique to each context. Although school level engagement has differed across countries, common themes include: 1. Establishing a central coordination mechanism for preparedness and response, 2. Addressing psychological protection and youth empowerment, 3. Strengthening reporting of violations, 4. Overcoming challenges of engaging duty-bearers.
1. Establishing a central coordination mechanism

At the school and community level, it has been vital to establish a mechanism of coordination for SZOP activities as an initial action. The ways that this has occurred has differed across countries, but in each case stakeholders have been convened, organized, and given a mandate to strengthen protection of schools. Establishing this mechanism has been key to progress made locally and examination of this practice across cases offers insights for future implementation.

The value of establishing a mechanism of coordination is manifold. Foremost, at the school level it encourages principles of local participation. Community members are trained and develop the capacity to manage the project according local needs. Over the last several years, a trend in global aid has been to transfer decision-making power to those immediately affected by the challenges that development projects seek to remedy (see concepts of 'school based management' by World Bank\textsuperscript{33}, UNESCO\textsuperscript{34}). The transfer of power to local communities can also increase investment and motivation in project activities. Within the bounds of SZOP, the empowerment of local community members has occurred by identifying or creating school based mechanisms of coordination for project activities.

Across the various countries where SZOP has been implemented, this mechanism has differed. In the case of Nepal, community based organizations (CBOs) were recruited and became “community facilitators.”\textsuperscript{35} They helped to create Codes of Conduct and communicate messages of the project. In oPt and DRC, the methods have also differed. In oPt, the strategy has been to establish School Disaster Management Committees (SDMCs) as groups dedicated to a single mandate of protecting schools from attack. In DRC the strategy has been to utilize existing Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) that already involve the most active parents and are viewed in positive regard by communities. The following conveys how each country developed a mechanism of coordination at the school level, with analysis of the methods concluded after the descriptions.

\textit{School Disaster Management Committees in oPt}

School Disaster Management Committees, otherwise known locally as “crisis cells”, have been an important first step for protecting education in oPt. The committees are unique because they are guided by a clear mandate to protect education from attack, concentrating all activities on this goal. Unlike utilizing PTAs or other school committees to coordinate the SZOP project, the SDMCs have been developed with one directive and as a result the focus is undiluted by other school issues.

The installation of SDMCs has been a new component to the SZOP project following the SSD. It is currently being piloted in oPt and Niger. In oPt, it has been particularly useful since the project focus has largely been to increase school capacity to respond to and prevent crisis, rather than pursue negotiations with parties to the conflict.

\textit{Selecting the SDMC}: This has been the task of school administrations, namely principals. With guidance from partner NGOs, schools have invited a variety of stakeholders to be trained and participate on the committee. The entire SDMC receives training support from a partner NGO, while teachers receive additional training from


the MEHE. Although the SDMC receives the most thorough training, all school staff is oriented on the project. Typically the SDMC is a body of 11-13 people. The composition includes students, teachers, school staff, parents, community members, and the principal.

Schools claimed it has been valuable to have community leaders or people with decision-making power participate. These individuals can mobilize community resources when needed such as materials to repair school boundary walls. They act as a bridge between schools and families by encouraging stronger parent participation and they spread awareness of project activities through social networks. In many of the schools visited for the research, a local imam was included in the project as a way to share information with the community. In one school, the imam was given the title of “media outreach coordinator.” The inclusion of people who can be characterized as “resource mobilizers” or “local influencers” has been an effective strategy in developing SDMCs and creates a strong link to the greater community.

“Our school is located between the two communities it serves so we decided to invite both village leaders to join the SDMC. It’s worked well because together they can get any resources we need. At one point, the school gate needed fixed and they got this done for us.” – Principal in Nablus, oPt

Among school staff, members have also been strategically selected. It has proven beneficial to include people with skill sets that can contribute to the project directly. For example the school counsellor and custodian are typically invited to join the SDMC. The counsellor can offer children valuable care and strategies for mitigating the psychological effects of the conflict. The custodian has access to all school buildings and knowledge of water, power, systems, etc. In the case of an imminent threat or unfolding violation, the custodian is an important actor in ensuring preparedness of the school itself. Teachers also comprise a large component of the SDMC. Principals varied in their approaches of selecting teachers. Some chose to invite active teachers who would enthusiastically contribute, while others chose to select less active teachers as a way to motivate their participation in protecting the school environment.

Children were cited as having an essential role in the SDMC. Typically only 2-3 students were invited to join although they are an important component for coordination and awareness among the student population. Child SDMC members attended meetings and provided feedback. They also shared information with other students during morning announcements. In addition, inclusion of children on the SDMC was important so students had a peer to address issues with when adult guidance was not initially desired. In many instances, children expressed that more students should be included on the SDMC. Limiting the number to 2 or 3 is insufficient for gaining quality feedback and inclusion of more children would ensure that activities are not only child-centered but child driven as well.

“It’s important to have children on the SDMC. They’re the ones who experience the harassment so their feedback is most valuable. Children tell us where and how things are occurring, but they also give good ideas for solutions.” – Parent SDMC member in oPt

Lastly, parents served on the SDMCs as a liaison between schools and communities. It was intended that parents on the SDMC would assist in mobilizing other parents in moments of crisis, such as calling on mothers to plead with soldiers when children were detained. Unfortunately, parent participation in SDMCs has struggled since inception of the project. During discussion groups with parents this issue was addressed and they cited primary limitations as distance, school access, and general apathy.

In many instances, schools served multiple communities and were located in areas between villages in order to serve all the students. Unfortunately, not having schools embedded into communities created space for more violations to occur, but the distance parents must travel also inhibited them from involvement in project.
activities. In addition, school access was an issue in communities where Israeli checkpoints controlled who could enter and exit the roads and paths leading to schools. In Hebron, parents stated the checkpoints delayed them from getting to school, were humiliating, and in some cases parents’ names were not on the access list. The limitations of parents are often overwhelming and getting to school is considered too burdensome to participate in SZOP activities.

**Parent Teacher Associations in DRC**

Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) as well as Community-based Child Protection Networks were of the key stakeholders that participated in the SZOP activities. Not only were they invited to the risk mapping/risk reduction plan but they were also trained on the six grave violations, children’s rights, and most importantly the role that the community plays in terms of monitoring and reporting of child protection violations and attacks on education. PTAs in general consisted of 8 members under the leadership of 3 president/vice-presidents, secretary, cashier, and 2 advisors (the last person is assumed to be a general member). The membership is renewable after a year and they attend weekly meetings and occasionally host all parents’ meeting.

PTAs in the sample schools were mostly active in terms of providing an additional layer of support to child protection. Three out of five schools (one in Nyiragongo and two in Masisi 2) commented on the preparatory work carried out by the PTA and head teacher in the night before the school reopening. They convened to discuss and check the school facilities to verify whether the school was safe enough to host sessions. One school in Masisi 2 was located in front of the main road where accidents were identified as a major threat. As a response, the PTA advised the first graders’ parents to accompany their children on their way to and from school to ensure their safety. The PTA members interviewed also stated that they were widely involved in dealing with conflicts in the classroom. For example, another PTA from a school in Masisi 2 hosted a meeting after a teacher filed a complaint about a student who was frequently late to class. The participants considered this work as part of SZOP activities, not because the issue being addressed was a threat to children or education, but rather because hosting a meeting helped to reduce corporal punishment and harm to students.

“The role of parents is to love school, encourage our children to study and behave in the classroom, and support schools by paying the school fees and taking on other initiatives to solve problems at school.”—Vice President of PTA in Sake, DRC

**Relevance**

Across oPt and DRC, efforts to establish central coordination mechanisms have differed according to the circumstances of each country and been designed to fit the needs of affected populations. In oPt, it has made sense to create an entirely new mechanism in the form of SDMCs. These committees align with oPt’s strategy to focus significant effort on building up local capacity to respond to threats. Since Israel has not agreed to be involved in project activities, a core aim has been to strengthen protection networks at the school level rather than divert resources towards engagement of all parties to the conflict. Additionally, SDMCs have had a high degree of relevance because all pilot schools are located in area C communities where Palestinian police have no access to respond to threats. In these areas, schools cannot rely on support networks beyond the school and local community. When violations unfold, schools must have the capacity to mitigate the situation themselves. Therefore, the strategy to focus on school level capacity building has fit well with the situation of conflict in oPt.

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36 It is called Parents Committee (Comite des Parents, COPA) in DRC
In DRC on the other hand, it made more sense to capitalize on the existing mechanism of the PTA and strengthen its capacity to function as an SDMC. When SZOP was introduced in North Kivu, the target schools already had established PTAs that were extremely well organized and played a central role in all aspects of school operation and management. In fact, PTAs were one of the most influential groups in the Congolese school community since most schools were dependent on the fees they collected from parents in the absence of unpredictable government funds. Coupled with this was mistrust in national leadership. Years of political instability, distance from the capital, and limited support from national authorities have created a society where community level governance is more frequently looked to than national leadership. Consequently, community based groups like PTAs serve to hold important and influential roles at the local level. Therefore, utilizing existing mechanisms was optimal in DRC rather than creating SDMCs.

**Effectiveness**

The primary aims of establishing mechanisms of coordination have been to facilitate activities, increase community participation, and strengthen support networks. Throughout focus group discussions, efforts to achieve these aims were addressed. Community members conveyed that overall SDMCs and PTAs were highly effective but required some revisions for the future.

In oPt, SDMCs have been effective in creating a sense that responses are a coordinated effort. Prior to the SZOP project, only a single teacher or principal typically responded to an incident. Schools claimed that through the work of the SDMCs, protocols have now been put in place where roles and actions are clearly defined. For example, when a child is detained, a teacher is sent to immediately assist while another teacher is called to substitute the class. At the same time, the principal and other SDMC members are tasked with contacting appropriate authorities, and the children who were with the detained child have been instructed on how to stay calm, avoid harm, and support one another. The network of support has resulted in heightened confidence to mitigate effects of the occupation. Additionally, SDMCs have contributed to building confidence among students for making it to school safely. Students cited that when they walk to and from school, SDMC members often accompany them or are stationed along the route in case children encounter military forces or other threats. According to community feedback, attendance rates have risen due to increased confidence in children.

In DRC, PTAs have been effective as a support network for the school principal who previously acted alone when responding to threats. PTAs now assist in deciding on school closures during a threat, rehabilitating school infrastructure after military occupation, and communicating with other PTAs when greater support is needed to respond to a violation. Having PTA members as key decision makers in addition to the leadership spearheaded by the school principal was effective in DRC because not only were they more knowledgeable about conflicts inside the community, connecting the dots between what is happening in and out of school, but also they could rapidly disseminate the decision made and mobilize the community members accordingly.

To increase the effectiveness of SDMCs and PTAs, communities have offered strong recommendations that include increasing child participation, strengthening information dissemination strategies, and addressing the factors that limit parent involvement. Among multiple stakeholder groups including students, teachers, and parents, it was cited that greater amounts of children should be included in project activities. In oPt, typically only two children were invited to participate in the SDMC, which was cited as insufficient in most focus groups discussions. To address this, some schools developed sub-committees where each of the child SDMC members lead a student group aimed at a particular intervention such as fire safety, documentation of violations, etc. This modification to the SDMC incorporated more students and encouraged greater dialogue about safety.
Regarding information dissemination strategies to the wider community, schools claimed a need to improve this since current efforts were considered weak. In DRC, information about the project was shared with the community through children’s plays, but this practice was infrequent and only accessed a small portion of the community. In oPt, information was sometimes shared through the local imam but this was only done in two of the five schools visited with few other outreach strategies. Across all sample schools, parents and community members were the stakeholder group found to have the least amount of knowledge and participation in the project—this was due to many factors such as political complexities/personal views, distance, school access, and apathy—but their involvement was still considered valuable for having strong support networks. In focus group discussions, activities aimed at information sharing were described as positive strategies for engagement of the community but weak in implementation. Further attention to dissemination strategies between SDMCs/PTAs and the wider community would increase effectiveness of the project. Additionally, addressing the inhibiting factors of parent involvement in each context would be beneficial.

Sustainability

Involvement of the SDMCs and PTAs in project activities contributes to overall sustainability of the project. It has transferred the management of activities to the school level and consequently encouraged greater investment and longevity of project principles. With particular regards to the sustainability of the SDMCs and PTAs, there is cause for optimism. In oPt, SDMCs are being incorporated into a national strategy of the MEHE to protect schools from attack. While in DRC, the PTAs are existing mechanisms and participants have cited strong support for the project. Additionally, the selection of key stakeholders in oPt and incorporation of active parents in DRC has transferred project management to community leaders who have become committed to the work.

2. Addressing psychological protection and youth empowerment

Over the last two decades the SZOP project has evolved and new directions have become apparent in both oPt and DRC. Particularly, when comparing projects from the early 2000s to the present, it is found that the approach has evolved from one solely focused on physical protection of children and schools to one that also promotes psychological protection and youth empowerment.

The earliest SZOP projects in Nepal and Sri Lanka incorporated aims and activities with the sole purpose of strengthening school protection. The project in Sri Lanka involved only the construction of school boundary walls while Nepal focused on gaining commitments from Maoists to protect schools by not bombing, attacking, or co-opting them for military use. The project progressed and was introduced to Afghanistan in 2013, where it also focused on physical protection efforts by emphasizing CoCs and spreading awareness through a provincial SZOP network and Educational Journalists Group.

In the more recent projects to be piloted in the post-SSD era, the approach has begun to expand. Elements of healing and psychosocial support, conflict transformation, and youth empowerment are now being introduced. In oPt, this has been in the form of child resilience programming. In DRC, children’s clubs have been established as well as “Listening Points” and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programming by the PNGO. The following conveys how each country is addressing psychological protection and youth empowerment, the relevance and effectiveness of each type of programming, and lastly issues of sustainability.
Child Resilience Programs in oPt

At the school level in oPt, Child Resilience (CR) programming has been a key component to the project. Uniquely, oPt has been the first and only place to implement CR in conjunction with the project. Linking the work was natural given conditions at inception of the project. Prior programming around child rights governance (CRG) and the Protective Sphere project helped to provide a focus on empowering Palestinian youth. These programs with the influence of a Save the Children staff member focused on resilience helped to contextualize the SZOP project so that CR was a valuable part of activities.

CR sessions involved a select group of children at each school, two teachers appointed as co-facilitators, and partner NGO field coordinators. Prior to sessions commencing with children, field coordinators were trained by Save the Children staff on how to deliver principles successfully. Teachers also consistently received trainings to ensure they understood all aspects of resilience and wellbeing. These teachers attended CR sessions with the expectation they would gradually take over facilitating responsibilities from the field coordinators.

Across all contexts, the intent of child resilience programming has been to go beyond addressing a child’s wellbeing to provide them skills and empower them to overcome challenges. It is a nonclinical psychosocial and protection methodology that focuses on children’s positive coping and resilience. The program in oPt is comprised of 12 structured sessions, led by trained facilitators that help children to understand concepts like peaceful interaction, problem solving, and enhanced capacity and awareness about self-protection and protection of peers.

In oPt, CR has helped to build confidence in children to withstand confrontations by soldiers and settlers. It has also given children a platform to discuss the conflict and speak about their feelings. As part of the SZOP project, CR goes beyond addressing external threats to children, to also ensure children have the skills to mitigate conflict internally.

“CR changed a lot of things about me. I talked about my feelings and the occupation. I learned how to deal with others and that in the end it’s not right to be violent. We all have rights.” –Student in Ramallah, oPt

Over the course of three years, the CR program has been adapted and taken different approaches in oPt. Initially the program added a summer camp to supplement learning gained from the sessions. In the following year logistical issues precipitated changing the summer camp to periodic field trips. In the last year of the project, field trips had been phased out and “child-led initiatives” had been introduced. Some of the child-led initiatives have included improving school canteens to support better nutrition and school clean ups to encourage positive sanitation practices. Principals and teachers have been strong proponents of the child-led initiatives because it helps children to engage what they learned in CR sessions in a tangible and relevant way. Over the course of three years, the CR programming has evolved to maximize effectiveness and child-led initiatives have been a key example of this.

Children’s Clubs in DRC

In DRC, Children’s Clubs (CCs) were utilized to ensure student involvement in SZOP activities and to empower them to overcome the challenges of conflict. The CCs existed prior to introduction of SZOP but were reinforced

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to assist with project goals. It was found that children were the most knowledgeable and active group that the SZOP project yielded and this was likely due to the work done with CCs. The groups typically consisted of 12 members who were recommended and elected by fellow students. CC members were extremely well informed about the program ranging from the six grave violations, Codes of Conduct (CoC), the use of suggestion box, to the MRM. They were at the forefront of all SZOP activities such as the risk mapping, monitoring and reporting various violations, and leading outreach to the broader community.

The significant increase in children’s knowledge and commitment was a foremost aim of the SZOP project. Various activities were conducted to give more attention to child safety, education, and participation. The reinforcement of existing CCs, combined with the advocacy work to educate stakeholders on child’s rights, provided safe space for children to voice their opinion and become actively involved.

The Children’s Club builds “children’s self-esteem and confidence, increases their access to information, [and] develops their solidarity and leadership qualities.” According to the SZOP project officer in Goma, when some students were absent from school, CC members took the initiative to investigate the cause, solved the problem, and advised them to return to class. In this case a student associated with an armed group had come to school with a weapon. This created fear among many students and decreased attendance rates. The CC helped to mediate this issue by communicating with the absent students and encouraging their return.

Children’s Club members also functioned as child brigades actively leading and participating in the community outreach work that the partner NGO (PNGO) was organizing regarding SZOP concepts. Children were encouraged to feel empowered to share and educate the wider community. CC members in a small school in Masisi 2 recalled walking along the street markets and raising awareness on child protection, children’s rights to education, school safety, etc. These children were visibly proud and confident when they shared the story.

“I think when I participate, when they engage me in any activities and when I say something, I feel I am contributing to the safety of my school.” - Student from Nyiragongo, DRC

**Listening Points (LPs)**

As a further component to psycho-social support, the SZOP project in DRC offered Listening Points (LPs) located within communities. To ensure that children received appropriate care when needed, LPs were stationed in 4 different locations in North Kivu where attacks occurred most frequently but resources to respond were historically limited. The LPs ensured that a trained staff member from the PNGO was available at all times to provide immediate services. The LPs were used for a variety of purposes including reporting of attacks and violations, serving as a referral mechanism, as well as conveying much needed psychosocial support (counsellors were available through LPs).

**Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR)**

The PNGO also engaged in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) activities to assist children formerly participating in armed groups. This activity was not part of the original project, but later introduced once a need for it became apparent. During the year between 2016 and 2017, with the help of the PNGO, 16 kids left the armed groups and were sent to the transition center. For those above age 15, SC DRC strongly

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39 Interview with the Project Officer
advocated for the school principals to enrol them in an accelerated education program, which allowed them to finish their secondary education in three years instead of the traditional six. The reintegration component of DDR has assisted in providing children healing care and psychosocial support necessary to move forward.

Relevance

The incorporation of psychological protection and youth empowerment has been an important component to meet the needs of children in conflict-affected contexts. In oPt where children experience protracted conflict and psychological violence is pervasive, solutions to help mitigate this are valuable. Students describe ongoing harassment by soldiers and settlers—although incidents do not always end in violence, the psychological impact remains. In some cases, students must walk through Israeli settlements to access school, leading to daily negative experiences. The incorporation of CR as part of the SZOP project has been an important healing component.

The youth empowerment through Children’s Club was also highly relevant in DRC and its success was tightly linked to the overall success of the program. For the past two decades, participants expressed that schools have never been considered a “zone of peace” but rather a “zone of conflict.” Schools were occupied by rebel groups as a base of operations (this occurred in 5 out of 5 schools visited) and utilized as public shelters for IDPs (this occurred in 2 out of 5 schools visited). Even when schools were in session, students witnessed classrooms being bombed and materials being damaged. Attending school sometimes left psychological damage and reminded children that conflict could unfold at any time. To remedy the psychological harm occurring for children, messages conveyed through activities like CCs, LPs, and DDR programming were highly relevant.

“We didn’t know our rights, [but] through SZOP project we know our rights - A child has the right to learn, a child has the right to be protected, a child should have a name, a child should participate in school decisions.” -Student from Nyiragongo, DRC

Effectiveness

Addressing psychological protection and youth empowerment has aimed to strengthen children’s resilience to conflict and give them skills to make positive decisions. It has been well received by communities, adults and children alike. During focus groups, adults claimed that children were better able to vocalize their feelings when violations occurred. In discussions with children, they agreed that the attention they received helped them to feel confident for continuing to attend school. Both CR and CCs have also assisted in developing stronger student leadership. Particularly in oPt, child-led initiatives have encouraged a process of critical thinking, planning, and taking action. Children claimed feeling empowered to make positive change.

In the case of oPt, although CR was highly valued among school communities, feedback was given regarding how it could be more effective. Specifically, engagement of only a small subset of the student population has created obstacles. Students feel the program is exclusive and selection is not conducted through democratic processes. Some students conveyed that the timing of CR sessions during the school day is also not ideal. Students must miss classes to attend CR sessions since staying after school may pose a threat to student safety. SC and partner NGOs have tried to address the lost class time by working with principals to schedule CR sessions when students are either on break or in classes where an absence will not disrupt learning such as physical education. Nonetheless, students who attend sessions cite the missed class time as an area for improvement and claim inclusion of all students could eliminate this issue.
In DRC, information struggled to move beyond the CC to the wider student population. The level of knowledge among CC members was strong but never disseminated to others. Consequently, the CC remains limited in effectiveness with room for improvement. Additionally, students described the supervisors of the CCs to be most commonly men with a need for more female involvement. It is extremely beneficial for female students to have female leadership in the school community. Addressing this could improve effectiveness of the project.

**Sustainability**

Addressing children's psychological needs helps to facilitate attitudinal changes and capacities to respond to violations. Programs such as CR take both a short and long term strategy to strengthening protection. It focuses on the child instead of external factors that are difficult to control. In the short term it gives children immediate skills to respond to violations. In the long term it enhances resilience. These skills are carried beyond the project.

In regards to sustainability of programming, in oPt teachers were being trained as facilitators. At each school two teachers were selected to work with PNGO staff with the intent they will eventually take over and lead CR sessions. This supports schools to retain valuable skills even if funding for the program should cease. Unfortunately, support for supplemental activities such as field trips and child led initiatives still comes from Save the Children and it is unclear if the MEHE will adopt this in the new policies that are being developed.

In DRC, efforts aimed at psychological protection and youth empowerment have potential to be sustainable through the MOE’s commitment to link the SZOP project with current peace education programming. If this commitment turns to action, children will have continued support to address the harm they are experiencing. Unfortunately it remains unclear if these commitments will become reality—the geographic size of DRC and efforts to decentralize government functions limits whether national commitments will be enacted locally. Regarding maintenance of CCs, school communities were enthusiastic to continue but claimed a need for more support (primarily material resources). They expressed wanting to continue but claimed this would only occur if the SZOP project could offer them supplies, leading to questions of sustainability. LPs and DDR programming have been projects led by the PNGO, who was conducting this work prior to SZOP and therefore sustainability of these programs remains strong.

3. Strengthening Reporting of Violations

Since 2005, the U.N.-led MRM has been the global depository for reporting attacks on education. Information is used in United Nations’ reporting, including the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict as well as country-specific reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. Since these reports can trigger action by the U.N. Security Council or other actors, it is important to develop capacity for communities to monitor and report attacks.

With this in mind, the SZOP project has vigorously supported efforts to strengthen local knowledge on reporting and the MRM mechanism. This has been a common component to the project globally, especially since the SSD in 2015. Unfortunately, not all countries have an official MRM and therefore, reporting does not guarantee international action. In the past, only parties that recruit and use children were included in the annexes of the annual report. However, in 2009, 2011, and 2015, the Security Council adopted resolutions to
also list armed forces and groups who kill and maim children, commit sexual violence against children, attack schools and hospitals, and abduct children.\[^{40}\]

For countries that do not meet the UN specifications, reporting mechanisms may still be in place but the U.N. is not mandated to respond. This is the case in Israel/oPt, where it is considered a “situation of concern” and the country has yet to qualify for an official MRM. Nonetheless, reporting occurs voluntarily with the intent that reports will eventually provoke an official status and consequently, international action. DRC was a pilot country for introducing the MRM and as such, has had an official reporting mechanism since 2005. The following provides how SZOP projects in oPt and DRC are strengthening reporting mechanisms at the school/community level. In most cases the focus has been on enriching MRM reporting, but in some cases (specifically DRC) reporting beyond the six grave violations (recorded by the MRM) has been emphasized as well.

### Monitoring and Reporting in oPt

Monitoring & Reporting of violations has been a major piece of project activities in oPt. At the school level all stakeholders were familiar and most had been trained by both Save the Children and the MEHE. During focus group discussions, the topic continually came up and was cited as an essential part of project activities.

“We report everything now. Before we didn’t know to do this because these problems are just our life— [violations] were normal to us. But now we know that we have rights and we want the world to know that our education is being affected by the occupation.” –Student in Hebron, oPt

Prior to the SZOP project, various mechanisms were in place to report violations to children and schools. With the inception of SZOP, efforts were made to consolidate the mechanisms and improve efficiency and effectiveness of reports. Particularly, strengthening the MRM has been vital to the SZOP goals and significant attention has been given to training actors at the school level on its use. MRM reporting is a valuable long-term strategy for gaining an official designation, garnering international responses, and contributing to global advocacy for the movement to protect education from attack.

In early 2017, the MRM was streamlined and transitioned into an online platform. The online MRM has allowed schools to more quickly report violations and ensure information is passed to government authorities. The MRM directly links schools with the field follow-up unit, a department within the Palestinian Authority MEHE. The field follow-up unit is in charge of collecting information about violations and engaging the District Coordination Office (DCO) to negotiate on behalf of schools when necessary. Schools have reported that since the MRM went online, there have been instances when information was sent to the MEHE and representatives have been able to arrive on site as the issue was unfolding. Typically, schools do not rely on the MEHE to resolve incidents as they are occurring, the DCO is largely tasked with that, but support from the MEHE is welcome at schools that have expressed low confidence for mitigating violations historically.

As an unanticipated result of the project, cameras have been allocated by the MEHE to strengthen school security. Over the last three years, the MRM has undergone continual improvements, one being the ability to upload photos and video for documentation purposes (as an extra feature). School communities have been trained on how to document violations and video surveillance is helpful to supplement those activities. In

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addition, the cameras are meant to deter potential violations from occurring. Visibility of the cameras provides a level of protection from perpetrators who do not want to be caught on tape.

Cameras have helped to strengthen security in many ways, but communities have described them as a "double edge sword". The cameras help to deter some offenses from occurring, but also encouraged intrusions by soldiers who demanded to see the footage. Principals noted numerous occurrences when soldiers entered school grounds to ask for the recordings. In many instances there was no immediate need to see the footage but soldiers used it as an excuse to intrude on schools. Therefore, the cameras in one sense helped to deter violations while in another sense rendered the school a target. The provision of cameras was done outside of official SZOP activities and beyond the recommendations of Save the Children. Therefore is an unintended consequence of the project but displays one of the many ways that school communities and the MEHE have adapted and taken ownership of the project.

**Monitoring and Reporting in DRC**

As previously noted, DRC has had an official MRM for more than a decade and "the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO)'s child protection section manages the monitoring, reporting, and verification of grave violations41". After violations have been reported from the school level, SC DRC shares them with the Education Cluster; and when required links them to the MRM verification system and facilitates an appropriate response42. To encourage reporting, SC DRC has provided trainings to students, teachers, local authorities, representatives of PTAs, and community-based child protection networks. The MRM has been a focal point of trainings and informative posters can be found throughout schools on the six grave violations. However, trainings were also given that discussed violations to CoC and general child protection principles.

"When I observe any abuse or violence, I report the maltreatment. If it is an abuse that I cannot stop, I report to my supervisors." – Children’s Club member in Nyiragongo, DRC

**Suggestion box:** Suggestion boxes are a reporting or feedback mechanism at the school/project level that feeds into the existing formal ones (including the MRM when applicable). For every school that was introduced to SZOP, a suggestion box was located in the center of the school grounds to widely and openly communicate with the children and the community. Perhaps due to its physical presence, the suggestion box was most frequently brought up when stakeholders were asked about SZOP activities. Periodically, the MEAL officer visited schools, opened the suggestion box, and read notes together with the head teacher. This served as an anonymous way for people to voice concerns or report on violations. Questions remain regarding the sustainability of this practice, however to ensure all suggestions/reports were heard, the head teacher did not have access to the box. Issues that could be tackled at the school level were handled on site and others that were more severe and needed further steps were taken to the SC office, as SC is useful for contacting appropriate authorities.

"If it is a sensitive issue that you don’t feel comfortable sharing, write it and put it in the suggestion box." – Student in Nyiragongo, DRC

In 2016, SC DRC received a total of 466 complaints from 30 schools that were implementing SZOP in North Kivu. The majority of complaints were not considered within the six grave violations against children and therefore, not reported to the MRM. It should be noted that MRM reporting was not the intended purpose—


42 Taken from NMFA Final Report, 2016: Implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict through Schools as Zones of Peace.
suggestion boxes were meant to look more broadly at child protection and school issues. Almost 70% of the feedback/complaints constituted material support such as construction and renovation of school buildings, supply of classroom materials such as desks, textbooks, curriculum, etc. Next ranked reports of child abuse (24%), which were a violation of teacher and parents CoCs. Teachers had mixed feelings towards the box. On the one hand, they thought it was beneficial for creating a safer school environment but they also felt “simply reported on” and unequipped to manage the classroom without the use of corporal punishment. Many teachers also noted that there are multiple cases of misuse such as jobless community members falsely reporting on them, which threatened their employment.

Relevance

Strengthening reporting mechanisms, particularly the MRM, in communities affected by conflict is an important link between short and long-term strategies. In the short term, it provides assessment of violations specific to each school and draws attention to creating targeted responses. For example, in oPt one principal reported that children were being stopped by soldiers and settlers at certain locations along their walk to school, sometimes injuring or harming students. The report helped to identify geographic areas of concern so that parents and community members could be present in those areas at designated times to deter harassment and violations from occurring. In the long-term, reporting works to achieve two goals. Foremost it serves as a call to action for the international community to intervene (i.e. CTFMR enters into dialogue with parties to conflict). Reports also contribute to global advocacy since data can be used in forums beyond the U.N. to represent the situation for children in conflict-affected settings. Moreover, as was the case in oPt, reporting created an element of hope and optimism among the local population. Having their everyday realities and experiences with conflict considered by the international community elicited a feeling that progress could occur—this has been an important facilitator of investment in the overall SZOP project.

Effectiveness

Measuring the effectiveness of reporting can occur in two ways. First, strengthening mechanisms of reporting can be evaluated on community feedback regarding frequency and the timely and comprehensive nature of reporting. Secondly, it should be considered, what has reporting actually achieved?

With regards to strengthening mechanisms and building local capacity, the project has been effective in many ways. In oPt, school communities have been trained and all stakeholders cited high value in this activity. School staff, students, and community members have been vigorously documenting and supplying data. They have been photographing incidents, recording via security cameras, and had both regular and ad hoc meetings to convey information on violations to the school principal. When asked about how to report violations, almost all stakeholders in focus group discussions could describe clear protocols to accomplish this. The online mechanism and a refined submission form have also strengthened this process by allowing for greater ease (e.g. no longer sending paper documents to the MEHE) and better organizing the information with attachments etc. In DRC, effective practices have been to establish child-friendly reporting mechanisms such as suggestion boxes, and reporting mechanisms that also ensure immediate assistance such as Listening Points. Diversifying the ways information can be reported has helped to increase the frequency of reports and address concerns in a timely manner.

Areas where efforts to strengthen mechanisms could be more effective include further capacity building on what constitutes a violation or attack and addressing the fact that many parents or children may be linked to armed groups as former ANSAs. Regarding reporting, although communities had cited that this had improved significantly, there was still expression that some instances went unreported. In oPt, this was not problematic

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43 Interview with the MEAL officer
but in DRC it was evident that new knowledge gained from the SZOP project was at times not translated into practice due to the complex reality that the school community resided in. For example, there was a strong tendency amongst the stakeholders - be it the children, parents, teachers, and head teachers - that did not identify ANSAs as an entity that must be reported on. Some even considered them "the protectors of the community" and therefore acknowledged them as a part of their community. In addition, some of the parents had served in the M23 movement just a few years prior and were often wearing two hats as both ex-combatants (in some cases current combatants) and parents within the school community. The complexity of the conflict made reporting a challenging task and further training on what constitutes a violation and how it should be addressed is needed to increase effectiveness.

In DRC, another layer of confusion on whether to report was added from the attacks that did not occur from the militias. In two schools out of five visited by the researcher, they experienced attacks from civil society such as protesters and police due to ongoing political instability. The SZOP project emphasizes that regardless of the perpetrator, violations must be reported on but this principle did not translate well to the local level. Early this year when there was a transition of local authorities and the change of tribal kings, a civil society group called for school closures as an indication of support. School authorities decided to stay open for the security of students who might show up. As a result, protesters occupied the school field, interrupted classes by throwing rocks, and attacked classrooms. The teacher who was concerned about children’s safety kept students inside and was later arrested for disobeying police orders. This again reflects the complexity of the contexts that the SZOP project targets and the need to further address reporting practices.

Lastly, a reluctance to report in DRC was also found amongst parents and community members. In a private interview with one vice president of PTA, she shared that armed groups are still around and SZOP project cannot solve the problem. She expressed the fear of the rebel groups “getting back” (referring to revenge) after reporting.

"We live as a community. I meet them all the time. It is difficult to report if anything happens because they will know and get back.”-Vice President of PTA in Sake, DRC

A second way to consider effectiveness includes evaluating what the MRM and reporting is actually achieving in each context. In DRC, although minimal, the data recorded through the MRM were used to inform programmatic response. The report on “Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC” published by MONUC’s Child Protection Section (2013) is a good example of MRM-based analysis that had been used to generate broader discussion within the humanitarian community. Since the MRM in DRC is registered in official capacity, parties to conflict continue to be engaged due to MRM reporting but as an additional benefit reports are used as a needs assessment for NGOs to develop appropriate programs such as designing SZOP activities.

The MRM in oPt on the other hand, is not an official mechanism and therefore, does not mandate the international community to respond. A significant focus of SZOP project activities in oPt has gone to promoting reports of violations, with an emphasis on the MRM, but this activity has yet to yield any results. Although reports on the six grave violations have been verified and presented to the U.N. for more than three years, Israel/oPt has not been recognized in the Annual Report of the Secretary General on CAAC and consequently, intervention by the international community has not occurred. During focus group discussions with multiple stakeholder groups in oPt, there was a sentiment that confidence in the project would eventually be lost if

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44Because of this intricate relationship between ANSAs and local communities, it was paramount for SZOP project to heavily involve and encourage a strong buy-in from the local leaders. They were, according to the SZOP project officer in Goma, in a position to advise and to some extent, forbid armed groups from occupying school grounds and recruiting students, which were directly linked to the success of the program. Prior to the interaction and direct engagement with the community members, all local SC staffs were trained on the particular sets of communication manners, which included conflict-sensitive languages, gestures, and attitudes.


46http://watchlist.org/strengthening-mrm-implementation-in-drc/
communities did not see action at the international level. It can be concluded that the current MRM in oPt has been ineffective in producing results at the international level, but what has been effective is SZOP’s efforts to encourage and strengthen reporting mechanisms. Since significant effort is going to supporting the MRM, results at the international level should be considered; however, the indicator of progress should represent only what is actually achievable with SZOP—if reporting has improved.

**Sustainability**

The sustainability of reporting mechanisms depends on if countries are able to produce results. As was the case in oPt, communities may lose investment in the activity if accountability remains weak. Nonetheless, positive measures of sustainability have occurred including the MEHE in oPt promoting reporting as part of a new policy to be introduced in late 2017. Additionally, the online platform has made it easier and faster for communities to engage in this activity. In DRC, weak accountability has also been noted as one of the reasons for minimal engagement. Communities have yet to put high value on reporting, especially considering the distrust towards national leadership. A missing link that would encourage sustainability in DRC, is to display what reporting has accomplished thus far (dialogue between international authorities and parties to conflict).

4. Overcoming Challenges of Engaging Duty-Bearers

According to the Guidelines, all parties to conflict must agree to protect schools from attack. Specifically, Guideline #5 states, “all parties to armed conflict should, as far as possible and as appropriate, incorporate these guidelines into, for example, their doctrine, military manuals, rules of engagement, operational orders, and other means of dissemination, to encourage appropriate practice throughout the chain of command.” The SZOP project has supported this aim to include all parties to conflict by targeting direct action with ANSAs. As one of the six primary activities of SZOP, working with ANSAs is intended to open dialogue on protecting schools from attack as well as encourage adherence to norms consistent with the Guidelines. SZOP seeks to bring all parties to conflict into agreement that children and education must be protected.

Across all contexts, it is challenging to engage the perpetrators, or “duty-bearers” of violations. Nonetheless, it remains a critical point of progress. If the duty-bearers are not engaged, the SZOP project remains reactive in nature with little advancement made towards changing the situation of children and armed conflict.

The context of oPt has proven especially challenging in this regard. The lack of engagement with the Israeli military and Jewish settlers creates a one-sided effort for ensuring the right to education is maintained. Although progress can be made with regards to capacity building and extending skills and resources necessary for protecting education, elimination of the threats that schools face cannot be remedied without participation from all parties to the conflict. Unfortunately, the complex political situation in oPt limits Save the Children and SZOP partners from engaging with the military and settlers. Some discussion has occurred with considerations to recruit local Israeli NGOs to engage but this idea is yet to come to fruition (and may not ultimately be productive). The lack of engagement of the duty-bearers in oPt has been a major limiting factor, where no easy solutions exist. In the absence of this, the SZOP project has focused on local level capacity building to respond to attacks; however, progress towards ending violations is elusive.

In DRC, the SZOP project has been successful in engaging the duty-bearer of violations, but—as expected—challenges remain. To accomplish this task, Save the Children has partnered with Geneva Call (GC) to directly engage with major ANSAs and improve their knowledge of humanitarian norms such as protecting children in

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armed conflicts. As part of SZOP project, GC initiated conversations with 5 ANSAs regarding their enforcement of the Guidelines and analysed the factors that often lead to the use and attacks of schools. GC conducted trainings based on the level of knowledge and understanding of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), since some ANSAs were more aware of it than others (SCN ECHO Proposal, 2015). Within the same armed group there were also learning discrepancies. Therefore, a new training kit was developed and to respond to these needs and incorporated the Guidelines. It included a manual for trainers, presentations to facilitate the training, and pre- and post-tests to evaluate the learning and inform the following sessions. More materials were prepared to support the learning and its dissemination to others such as the booklets, posters, and videos.

Through media campaigns, which mainly used 9 local radio stations, GC also aimed to raise awareness among combatant groups in which dialogue had not yet been initiated and to inform local communities about the existence of the Guidelines. The commitment of the community and local authorities is critical in that it leads to the buy-in of the armed groups in the area. This was part of “Fighter not Killer” campaign that began in July 2016, which educated the local population on IHL especially regarding the protection of education from attack. So far the response from ANSAs has been favorable since many groups identified themselves as protectors of the community. No ANSAs were resistant to the idea since GC approached from the humanitarian angle rather than focus on the violations to IHL.

Relevance

To support all the Guidelines, incorporating duty-bearers of violations is essential. Particularly in DRC, according to findings from the baseline study, ANSAs’ presence on the school ground was identified as one of the biggest threats to students’ safety and therefore engaging these duty bearers directly as part of the SZOP project has been highly relevant to the context. Again the narrative that GC applied when approaching ANSAs was relevant since they adopted the angle that ANSAs have a duty to protect the community, including educational networks. This rhetoric of “community protectors” is consistent with how ANSAs view themselves and therefore, a relevant approach.

In addition, engaging communities controlled by ANSAs contributed to relevance of the project. According to the SZOP project officer in Goma, ANSAs have legitimized their resurgence in these communities, recruited soldiers, and offered rationale for the conflict. In short, they have convinced communities under their control to embrace them since they are there to “protect and serve.” Therefore, involving these communities and local leaders has been relevant to ensure all stakeholders share common understanding of protecting schools from attack and the principles of the Guidelines.

Effectiveness

To their credit, Geneva Call has made strong progress with engaging ANSAs. Since the inception of the project some armed groups have some armed groups and adopted the Guidelines by including them in their rules and policies. Amongst the groups that GC initiated dialogue with, one group - the Alliance des Patriotes pour un Congo Libre et Souverain (APCLS) – has signed the Deed of Commitment. Depending on the source, it has been noted that

48 Taken from NMFA Final Report, 2016: Implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict through Schools as Zones of Peace
50 Ibid
51 Interview with a staff from GC Goma Office
there are roughly 30 armed groups in North and South Kivu\textsuperscript{53} and up to 70\textsuperscript{54} of them in eastern DRC. It is a small achievement yet small victories count considering the new learning it generates. A staff member from the GC Goma office commented that with lessons learned from the first agreement, they feel more equipped when approaching the new ANSAs. Now they know what works and what to expect and negotiate when opening up a new channel with ANSAs.

Although slow and steady progress is apparent in DRC, challenges remain. First, there are still a large number of major ANSAs active in the eastern Congo. Moreover, there is always an issue of security, which makes it difficult for GC to provide continued support to the ANSAs that they are already in contact with. A follow up sensitization is key to the armed groups as well as the community members in the controlled area. However physically reaching them has been a challenge since the majority of ANSAs are not sensitized and do not agree with GC activities causing access to be limited. In addition, the work that GC does is greatly dependent on the dynamics of the conflict, which tend to be extremely volatile. Coupled with that, is the nature of their work, which requires a long-term commitment to change mind sets and behaviors of ANSAs.

**Sustainability**

Engaging the ANSA officers as core participants in the SZOP project is in itself highly sustainable from the aspect that it is directly eliminating the duty-bearers and preventing future violations. However, other sustainability issues remain unclear since there is concern that ANSAs may easily regress to old ways. SC is trying to circumvent this issue by educating communities on the Guidelines so that they can address when ANSAs are in violation of the Guidelines. Since ANSAs do not want to jeopardize their relationships with communities, this may serve to sustain the work.

**National Level Engagement**

Across oPt and DRC, the project has engaged the national level in different ways, but comparison across contexts displays common approaches. These approaches are consistent with aims of the multilevel engagement model but described in more detail via the following categories: 1. Resource allocation, 2. Coordination of partners, 3. Advocating for policy change.

### 1. Resource Allocation

As school communities mapped threats to education they also worked to create disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management plans. Through this process they created targeted solutions to counter threats. Many of these solutions called for external support, which was sourced from a multitude of actors including Save the Children, education cluster partners, and the MOE/MEHE. The acquisition of both material resources and training support from national authorities and other partners helped schools to make tangible progress towards goals.

Most notably, in oPt, the MEHE provided buses and cameras in efforts to strengthen school security. These provisions were not officially supported by the SZOP project, but nonetheless displayed how communities adapted projects to their needs. During the risk mapping exercises, the most commonly cited dangers for children occurred en route between school and home. These risks included harassment by settlers and soldiers.

\textsuperscript{53} Taken from ECHO project proposal: Schools as Zones of Peace: Operationalizing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict

detainment, checkpoint searches, and the danger of crossing Israeli roads with fast moving traffic in order to get to school. Schools have tried to mitigate these risks on their own by stationing teachers and adults on the path to school or by creating walking groups accompanied by an adult, but violations were still occurring.

To assist schools on this issue, the MEHE provided buses to safely transport students. The provision of buses for at-risk areas was occurring prior to the introduction of SZOP, but the project helped to identify more schools that would benefit from transportation and increased awareness among school communities to advocate for buses. Schools have cited that receiving this support from the MEHE has been the most valuable factor of success for strengthening the protection of children.

"Our greatest accomplishment was probably getting a school bus to pick up and drop off the kids. Because of that the kids are in far less danger since they don't have to walk- that's when a lot of things happen. We're about to finish our year with only one major violation. This wouldn't have happened without the buses." -Principal in Ramallah, oPt

The provision of buses in oPt elicits new considerations for the SZOP project. Typically, transportation has not been a component to project activities. Defining the “zone” has only considered the threats within school boundaries and not beyond. Therefore the situation in oPt, where threats are most commonly occurring before and after children arrive at school, creates new questions regarding how to define the “zone of peace.” In oPt, the zone has had to extend beyond school boundaries in order to effectively protect children.

Cameras have also been allocated by the MEHE to strengthen school security. As stated in prior sections, cameras have had mixed results. They are helpful for documentation of violations, but they also put schools at greater risk when soldiers come onto school grounds to demand footage or vandals try to damage them. Generally, schools welcomed the new resource but recognized the negative implications of it.

Lastly, schools in oPt received support to improve basic infrastructure. Some schools had dangerous stairways that lacked railings and one school was under threat of falling rocks. These threats were identified during risk mapping and assistance was requested from the MEHE, Save the Children, and other international NGOs. These threats were not related to the conflict, but nevertheless schools found it necessary to address them to increase school safety.

In DRC, allocation of resources, specifically material support from the MOE has been relatively weak and almost non-existent to the extent that teachers in target schools were rarely paid or paid on time for the teaching they had conducted over the semester. The SZOP project in DRC was functioning in a context where the government is not able to provide free primary education and students come from families that undergo extreme famine and poverty. Therefore, SC has been strategically integrating and introducing SZOP to the schools that were receiving EiE program support, which included components that provided resources on learning, recreational materials, and tuition coverage. With this finding from DRC, SZOP in South Sudan, introduced in August 2016, included infrastructural support as one of its key objectives to ensure children’s access to safe learning environment⁵⁵. In contexts where government support for education is minimal, alternative sources are required.

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⁵⁵ Taken from NMFA Application, 2016: Enhancing Quality Education and Building Peace in South Sudan
Report

Relevance

Since communities defined their own material needs during risk and resource mapping, the resources acquired were relevant to the context. Addressing this issue at the national level proved useful since communities typically lacked access to resources themselves. In the case of oPt, multiple schools voiced a need for buses and were able to receive them. Their assessment of needs was met with government support, displaying the relevance of risk mapping activities and coordinating with national partners.

Effectiveness

Schools expressed that acquiring resources was the most beneficial part of the project. In oPt, the provision of school buses was cited by all stakeholder groups as the most important component to SZOP since it ensured students made it to school safely. Many students noted that their attendance increased with introduction of buses.

Nonetheless, it was unfortunate how sometimes SZOP was less interpreted as a program for child protection and more as a potential source for material support. Requests for resources overwhelmed feedback gathered for future improvements. In DRC, SC has been strategic and effective in terms of addressing the shortage by introducing SZOP in schools that were receiving EiE program (20 out of 30 target schools), which included the components of material support. For example, 4 out of 5 schools where the researcher visited combined EiE with SZOP and they made most of the material support from EiE (i.e. learning and recreational materials, tuition coverage, etc.) and some materials unintentionally served as protection mechanism for the threats identified during the risk mapping activity. On the other hand, one school that did not receive EiE program was aware of its material support in other schools and emphasized the necessity and called for its addition. According to SZOP project officer in Goma, SC acknowledged this point and in the next funding cycle all schools will be benefitting from the material support.

Sustainability

Due to circumstances of poverty and unpredictable funding for resources by national authorities, it is unclear if “resource allocation” is a sustainable practice. On one hand, it is positive measure that national authorities have adopted the responsibility of this in some ways (e.g. oPt provision of buses). Yet, it is worrisome that school communities are claiming that success of their projects depend on this support. If government authorities are unable to provide schools with the resources and physical infrastructure needed to support school safety, schools may be less invested in activities.

2. Coordination of partners

Across oPt and DRC an array of partners have been identified and recruited into project activities. To strengthen work conducted at the school level, national partners have been engaged to provide support. This has largely occurred through trainings, establishing working groups, and engaging security forces.

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56 In one school where accidents in the lake and the main road were identified as threats, the recreational materials, which were part of EiE programming, distracted students and deterred them from accessing the lake. Teachers noted that students are now busy playing soccer and not tempted to leave the school grounds during recess.
Trainings

In each country, trainings were conducted with multiple government ministries. These trainings focused foremost on contextualizing the Guidelines but also raised awareness on child protection and monitoring of violations. Commonly, Ministries of Education, Ministries of Health, and Ministries of Defense were targeted for involvement. A positive outcome of the trainings has been the involvement of the Field Follow Up unit (FFU) in oPt.

Following trainings with Save the Children staff, the FFU (a department within the MEHE) became a key actor in the project. The FFU received trainings on the SSD and SZOP and has assisted in contextualizing the Guidelines. It serves as the primary point of contact for schools to report violations. By monitoring violations, the unit understands weaknesses in security according to each school and can provide better resources to strengthen the environments (e.g., buses). The unit also conveys reports of the six grave violations to the education cluster to increase advocacy and awareness of the realities existing for children in oPt. Lastly, the unit frequently engages the DCO to negotiate with Israeli military on behalf of children. Identifying and building a strong relationship with the FFU, as well as providing them ongoing trainings and support, has been an important factor of success in oPt.

Establishing Working Groups

The development of working groups aimed at SZOP goals has been beneficial to advocacy and planning in each country. In oPt, an advocacy sub-cluster was established within the education cluster in the early phases of the project. The advocacy sub-cluster was established in 2016 as a group dedicated to bringing attention to the situation of education and armed conflict in oPt. The group brought together lead agencies (UNICEF, NRC, World Vision, etc.) alongside education focused diplomatic missions (Belgium, Norway, Finland, Ireland). It provided an avenue for partners to discuss and strategize ways to protect schools from attack. Participants in the sub-cluster came from a variety of countries with the potential to transfer information to national actors back home, including government officials and NGO headquarters staff. The advocacy sub-cluster has since transitioned into the Education in Emergencies working group. Similar actions have occurred in DRC. Save the Children ensured that the already existing joint government and UN country task force on children and armed conflict (Groupe de Travail Technique Conjoint, GTTC), which had MOE, Ministry of Defense (MOD), Ministry of Interior and Security (MIS), MONUSCO, UNICEF, and other key actors also addressed attacks on education. As a result of the SZOP initiative the Education Cluster is now an active member of the task force.

Engaging security forces

Lastly, the incorporation of security forces at the national level has enriched efforts to ensure all parties to conflict are engaged and agree to the Guidelines. In the cases of oPt and DRC, security forces are not the primary duty-bearer of violations, but nonetheless bear responsibility for protecting schools and acting according to the Guidelines. Particularly in the case of DRC, it has been beneficial to recruit their involvement because although ANSAs are the most commonly cited perpetrators, security forces are also known to take over schools or harm children. In oPt, Palestinian security forces have not typically perpetrated violations, but as emphasized by a SC staff member, the project goals should also protect against future violations by establishing norms in the present—it is unclear how security forces will act in the future and as such, the Guidelines should be promoted to all parties.

A primary gain of incorporating security forces has been inclusion of the Guidelines in training manuals. In oPt, training guidelines were developed and endorsed by security forces. This was followed up with training
sessions. In DRC, the MOD also agreed to infuse the Guidelines into their military training manual, "Bukuya Alkari.”

**Relevance**

Reflecting on the fact that oPt and DRC have experienced protracted conflict that is at least decades long, identifying partners who have been working on mitigating risks and alleviating suffering, coordinating them in working groups, and recruiting them to be key participants in the training are important first steps and highly relevant for both contexts. Having MOD and MIS on board as national level partners for instance, was extremely beneficial in DRC in that their engagement directly affected the practices of the national police (operated by MIS) and national army (FARDC operated by MOD) to increase the level of security in and around schools but also to prevent further protection violations as they were unofficially identified as duty-bearers.

**Effectiveness**

Across both oPt and DRC, security forces have actively participated in the project and gone to the extent of including SZOP principles in training guidelines. Additionally, key actors in child protection/education (MOE/MEHE/MOH/INGOs) have voluntarily joined working groups aimed to protect schools from attack. Particularly in oPt, identifying the FFU as a partner has produced improved coordination and reporting.

Presently however, DRC has not been able to fully achieve active engagement at the national level as was evident in oPt. The Code of Conduct, which is one of the key activities in the SZOP project was held in the MOE office for months before its final validation. According to an interview with the project officer in SC Goma office, engaging the national political level is challenging because leaders are extremely transient due to the unstable political landscape and in a few cases some politicians were relatives of ANSAs and getting them involved proved difficult.

**Sustainability**

Weak engagement at one level yields weak coordination across all levels. Unless fluid communication and coordination across levels takes place and progress is felt by all stakeholders, the learning and practice introduced by SZOP will not likely be sustained. More so in DRC compared to oPt, the activities that targeted different levels tended to be seen in isolation and the linkage across the levels became either loose or unclear. Creative ways to encourage the buy-in at the national/provincial level need to be further explored.

3. Advocating for policy change

Ministries of Education have been essential partners in SZOP activities. Resources and coordination provided from the national level have assisted schools in making progress. Yet, the most significant contribution has been efforts to ensure sustainability by institutionalizing SZOP principles into national policy.

In the last year, the MOE has initiated what is called the “Contingency Plan” which is the creation of policy targeted at better protecting schools. The policy was conceived following the launch of SZOP activities. The Contingency Plan is not a direct result of the SZOP project, the MOE has long understood the need to protect schools, but concepts promoted by SZOP have been absorbed in the planning for it and SZOP pilot schools now

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57 Interview with a project officer in SC Goma office
serve as the model. The Contingency Plan is still in development stages and not much information was available at the time of data collection, but it is intended to be introduced across the whole of oPt and engage multiple ministries in the near future. It is a comprehensive effort at protecting education and a first of its kind measure for Palestinian schools.

In DRC, measures to reform or develop appropriate policy have been slow but commitments made. The first step taken for SZOP in DRC at the national level was to advocate for endorsement of Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), which was carried out in July 2016. To contribute towards this achievement, a legal review of current legislation looking for ways in which the SSD could be best implemented in the context of DRC was carried out. According to the external consultant (conducting the legal review) whose expertise was in law, it was found that DRC’s constitution sheds light on children’s rights to education but lacks the specific aspect of protecting education, especially protecting schools from attacks. The following September, the consultant presented this finding at a roundtable discussion held for national stakeholders and there, the practical implementation of the Guidelines was subsequently discussed. The MOE for example noted that they would adopt the guidelines by incorporating it within their existing peace education work and add in the gaps of school safety and child protection. As stated previously, the MOD also agreed to infuse the Guidelines into their military training manual, “Bukuya Alkari58.”

Relevance
The approach taken in oPt and DRC to promote policy change involved gaining feedback from national actors, ensuring relevance of the activity. As could be noted above, oPt went beyond SZOP objectives set forth at the national level and was steps ahead compared to the work in DRC. This was possible due to the strong institutional buy-in from the Palestinian Authority, which provided a greater advantage for SZOP to roll out in oPt over DRC at the national level. On the flipside, the type of efforts placed in DRC differed because not only were discussions on child protection and protecting schools from attacks relatively new but also the process of reaching consensus and gaining strong commitment at the national level required more work.

Effectiveness
Advocating for policy change has been more successful in oPt compared to DRC because first of all, the project roll out in the former has been twice longer - 3 years - than the latter and most importantly, the institutional buy-in, specifically the governmental ownership in oPt far exceeded that of DRC. That is, the Palestinian government based on the learning from SZOP, took on the initiative and developed a nationwide policy that could be applied beyond the target schools yet capitalizing on them as advanced models to generate continued learning. This can be partially explained by the different nature of conflict in two countries - interstate for oPt vs. internal for DRC - that yielded relatively stronger and more stable political leadership in oPt compared to DRC. Additionally, distance between the national government in Kinshasa and provincial government in Goma may have been a factor.

Sustainability
In addition, because oPt has the fertile ground of strong buy-in in the national level, not to mention vigorous reporting practices supported by the school level, as long as there is confidence regarding the effectiveness of the program, oPt has strong circumstances and is on fast track to achieving sustained progress in child protection and protecting education from attacks. More doubts and concerns regarding the sustainability of policy changes are geared towards DRC where there are frequent changes in the political landscape and school

58 Interview with a project officer in SC Goma office
communities were reluctant to place faith in political leadership and activities in each level were seen in isolation.
Chapter IV: Conclusion

The security of children and schools remains precarious in countries around the world. Attacks on education are pervasive in places affected by armed conflict, political instability, and weak systems of law and human rights accountability. The Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) has been an important measure to counter the growing attacks. It has been a critical first step for many countries in the effort to protect schools during armed conflict. Yet, commitments must become actions and political dialogue must transfer into progress at the school level. This has been the rationale for revitalizing the SZOP project. Reintroducing the project in the aftermath of the SSD has offered countries a clear and manageable path forward for what can often seem an overwhelming task.

The pilot countries of oPt and DRC have displayed how different projects can look while at the same time working towards the same goals of meeting the SSD. Comparing and contrasting these two contexts helped to identify common challenges and how the project was adapted broadly. Review of the case studies in each country elicited thematic areas that serve to organize the activities occurring across contexts. The following offers a summary of the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of SZOP activities, unintended effects of the project, recommendations, and lastly some concluding thoughts and broad considerations for the project.

Summary of relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability

Relevance

- Based on the context of the country, priorities were identified and resources were allocated: In DRC, the two pillars of resource allocation has been the capacity building across levels and the sensitization of ANSAs who were identified as core duty-bearers of the conflict. In oPt however, resources were streamlined to capacity building and extending skills necessary for protecting education since elimination of the threats cannot be remedied.

- When designing the activities, each country weighed the benefits of new vs. existing structures: In oPt, pilot schools were located in Area C communities where Palestinian police did not have access, thus it was critical for schools to be equipped with a new protection network to respond to threats themselves. In DRC, target schools were established with organized PTAs thus they took on the job of SDMCs and LPs were added to buttress the response mechanism in each school community.

- Activities were child-centered, but not child-driven: In both countries, SZOP activities were child-centered in that they worked towards protecting children and building their self-esteem, leadership, resilience, and empowerment in protracted conflict (CR in oPt and CC in DRC). However, child participation could be more robust, a point emphasized by local communities. There is a need for their deeper inclusion from planning to leading activities.

- Seeking diverse avenues for material support: Countries that have long experienced protracted conflict often lack resources. For instance in DRC, the national government did not have resources to provide material support. Thus, SC integrated and introduced SZOP to schools that were receiving the EiE program, which had components of infrastructural support. In oPt, schools were able to advocate for material support from MOE (i.e. buses, cameras, etc.) after risk and resource mapping activities from SZOP.
**Effectiveness**

- Disaster risk management has produced protocols and coordinated responses: With the introduction of SZOP, pilot schools in both countries are informed with streamlined protocols and equipped with coordinated responses. Within the SDMCs in oPt, roles and actions are clearly defined and as a result, a strong network of support has heightened confidence to mitigate negative effects of conflict. PTAs in DRC also noted the increase in knowledge and skills to protect children and schools from attacks.

- Coordinating committees were extremely well-informed but the broader community remained unknowledgeable on SZOP goals/activities: In both countries, schools claimed a need to improve information dissemination strategies to the community at large. Especially in DRC, parents and community members who were not directly involved showed the least knowledge and commitment to SZOP principles. This finding was also consistent amongst children (CC members vs. non-CC members) who tended to show the highest level of knowledge and commitment.

- Diverse channels for reporting violations have been in place but challenges in what and whether to report continue: In oPt, school communities were vigorously photographing, recording incidents, and submitting online forms to supply data. In this context, the community was relatively informed on what and how to report. However, in DRC, due to the wide range of perpetrators residing in the community (i.e. ANSAs, police, civil protesters, security forces), there was confusion on what constitutes an attack and who can be a perpetrator of an attack. In addition, there were fears of retribution for reporting. As part of the SZOP project, suggestion boxes were located in schools to keep reporting anonymous, LPs were located inside the community to facilitate faster reporting and responses, and head teachers were given toll free calls to immediately report violations. Although these efforts have improved reporting, data displays that many violations still went unreported due to confusion and fears of retribution.

- Slow and steady progress has been made engaging duty bearers in DRC: SC DRC with the partnership of GC was able to involve ANSAs as one of the key participants of the project. So far GC has opened up a dialogue with 5 ANSA groups to incorporate the Guidelines into their rules and policies and one group (APCLS) signed the Deed of Commitment. Although slow and steady progress is apparent in DRC, challenges remain since there are still a large number of ANSAs in the area and security is an issue for GC to provide continued support.

**Sustainability**

- Without the continued project implementation, ANSAs may regress into their old practices: Sensitization of ANSAs led by GC has a high level of effectiveness in that it directly eliminates the duty bearers and prevents future violations. However without the continued sensitization of IHL and encouragement to adhere to norms, especially in terms of protecting children and education from attacks, ANSAs may regress into old ways and nullify GC’s efforts.

- Without retained confidence in the program, school communities may not sustain new practices introduced by SZOP: In both oPt and DRC, there has been a noticeable increase in knowledge, skills, and commitments surrounding SZOP principles. The project has been well-received in both contexts. However, doubts remain as to whether current support will be retained if communities have no way to view their progress. Without measures of success, sustainability is questionable.

- Policy formation has been a critical point of sustainability. Strong institutional buy-in in oPt has advanced this, but DRC remains weak with regards to involvement at the national level.
Unintended effects of the project

As part of the scope of the evaluation, the research team noted unintended effects of the project. During focus groups and interviews, school communities described how the project had been adapted as well as results of the activities. This information was compared with feedback from Save the Children staff on how SZOP was expected to unfold, ultimately garnering unintended effects of the project. Across oPt and DRC, SZOP was able to produce results that were not predicted during project design (e.g. policy formation) but were nevertheless within the intent of activities. These results were organized more as “positive practice” rather than unintended results (e.g. the establishment of SDMC child-led sub-committees in oPt). However, one issue stood out—the inclusion of environmental threats in risk mapping and DRR planning—that is noteworthy in this regard.

During FGDs, communities were asked to describe the process of risk mapping and DRR planning. What was unexpected in responses was the inclusion of environmental threats in the discussion. Typically the SZOP project has focused efforts on conflict-related factors. Especially in the aftermath of the SSD, project goals have emphasized protection from armed groups. However, it was found that at the school and community level in both oPt and DRC, the project was being adapted to address environmental threats in addition to conflict.

The merging of environmental and conflict-related threats produces some unique considerations broadly. Historically, the field of EiE has encompassed two threads that have included varied responses for natural disasters and conflicts. Each type of crisis presents different needs and obstacles, and thus calls for alternative strategies of intervention. The ways in which natural disasters and conflicts are addressed by aid and development agencies overlap but can also be quite different in practice. However, as the field of EiE has evolved, it has been increasingly observed that communities in crisis are often afflicted by both natural disasters and conflicts simultaneously. Consequently, a need has emerged to understand how programming can address complex crises like these in an effective manner.

The case studies in oPt and DRC exemplify this need. In each country, the SZOP project was introduced to address issues related to armed conflict, as was consistent with the goals of the Safe Schools Declaration. Yet, when communities provided feedback on how to contextualize the project, elements of environmental protection were included. In oPt, schools were reinforced for protection from falling trees and rocks, and in DRC communities voiced a need for lightning rods and protection from Lake Kivu. Communities claimed that to create “zones of peace” and protective environments for children, it was necessary to address both conflict and environmental threats.

The cases of oPt and DRC represent a common struggle in many crisis environments worldwide. Answering the question of how conflict and natural disaster responses can be integrated is a growing tension in the field of EiE. With regards to implications for SZOP, moving forward project planning may need to incorporate effective methods to address these issues.

It remains unclear if this practice should be recommended moving forward. In some ways, inclusion of environmental factors diluted SZOP aims. A focus on fortifying schools from natural disasters sometimes drew attention away from threats of armed groups. Yet it must be recognized that communities in both countries highly valued the merging of these threats in efforts to increase school safety. Feedback at the local level is that environmental threats must be included.
Recommendations at the global level

In the previous sections, insights were provided on the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of SZOP activities. This section takes those findings into consideration and offers more concrete recommendations moving forward. Recommendations are organized by thematic area. A table is provided at the end of the section to present existing practices that should continue as well as new practices to enrich the project.

**Theme: Establishing a central coordination mechanism**

- Increasing child participation: Across all stakeholders surveyed it was found that child participation was considered weak. In oPt, participants stated that having only 2-3 children on the SDMC was insufficient. In DRC, although the CCs were active, knowledge was consolidated to the group and did not extend to the larger student population. Therefore, it is recommended that children be included at a greater extent, particularly in planning and coordinating of activities or in identified leadership roles.

- Creating community dissemination strategies: One of the most common challenges of the project was gaining community involvement. In some cases this was due to apathy but in most cases there was a weak link in communication. Information was slow to disseminate from those coordinating SZOP activities to the wider community. To remedy this, a more thorough strategy is needed. Both oPt and DRC had made some headway in this regard—oPt had included imams in SDMCs and DRC had promoted community plays, yet more work is required. It is recommended that a strategy be developed that identifies “gate-keepers” of information in communities (to recruit in project activities) and potentially draws on the work with educational journalists in Afghanistan.

- Establishing measures of progress at the school level: At the school level, participants struggled to understand progress. Especially in oPt, community members claimed they would lose confidence in the project if circumstances did not change. Essentially their assessment of progress revolved around if the conflict improved, an unlikely scenario in regions with protracted violence. Therefore, schools require ways to identify progress made within the context of their schools. This could include measuring confidence of children for reaching school safely, structures fortified on school grounds, or number of altercations resolved peacefully with perpetrators.

**Theme: Addressing psychological protection and youth empowerment**

- Gender sensitive programming: Females in the Congolese community are often sexually harassed and raped by the rebel groups and fellow community members but due to cultural taboo they are inhibited and deterred from reporting. Moving forward, more work needs to be done directly engaging female community members and encouraging their participation. Through gender sensitive programs, females including students, teachers, and community members, will be able to enjoy a safe space and be empowered to voice their concerns and opinions. This work has occurred to some extent, but could be greatly expanded. So far in DRC, the PNGO once held a FGD targeting only females and sensitized them on protecting education from attacks and reporting sexual violations however noted the limitation and called for more opportunities and resources.

- Dissemination strategy among children: Across oPt and DRC it was found that the children included in the project were highly informed but beyond those directly involved, knowledge was weak. To increase the level of knowledge of all students, strategies for dissemination would be useful. For example, in oPt only a select group of students were invited to CR sessions. To maintain the quality of CR sessions, attendance should be kept low. However, supplemental activities such as inviting more students to join the child-led initiatives will increase participation but also may serve to disseminate knowledge if peer-to-peer networks are developed and children are encouraged to share.
Theme: Strengthening reporting of violations

- Addressing what constitutes an “attack”: Common feedback from participants was that school communities often had to be trained on what constitutes an attack. In oPt, children stated that violations such as harassment were so commonplace they did not know to report these incidents. This was easily clarified when the project was introduced. However, in DRC the situation has been more challenging. The political situation complicates reporting since in some cases parents were or are currently ANSAs. Additionally, perpetrators were both ANSAs and state security forces. Confusion regarding reporting was expressed in focus group discussions, therefore it is recommended that more time be spent clarifying this issue.

- Ensuring anonymity of reporting: In DRC there was some concern that reporting would create security issues for the person making the report. There was fear of retribution if anonymity was not ensured. Although there are avenues available for people to report violations anonymously, this needs to be emphasized among the community.

Theme: Overcoming challenges of engaging duty-bearers

- Seeking local partners in DRC: In DRC, GC has been effective in engaging multiple ANSA groups. However, to increase sustainability it is recommended that a strategy be created to build local capacity to take over these efforts. A concern exists that when GC completes their program activities, ANSAs may regress into old ways and therefore, local communities will need the capacity to respond.

- Investigating potential for local partners in oPt: The situation in oPt has been limiting for engaging duty-bearers. To remedy this, one recommendation was offered during interviews to investigate if liberal Israeli NGOs could be incorporated in the effort. Potentially Israeli NGOs could be recruited to work directly with the IDF. This is not an easy solution but it is recommended that the potential be further investigated.

Theme: Resource allocation

- Extending the zone of peace: In oPt and DRC, children often cited that violations were occurring off-school grounds. In oPt, children were approached by settlers, soldiers, and sometimes experienced tear gas. Consequently, adults in focus groups claimed that the provision of school buses by the MEHE had been the most effective effort in protecting children and education. This elicits a question of how the “zone of peace” has previously been defined and if an expanded definition is applicable. If interventions are required beyond the school boundary walls, then the “zone” should include the physical space of schools as well as the journey children must make to reach schools. A broad recommendation is to expand the “zones of peace” concept so that interventions can be considered for all places children experience threats. It was also found that “zones of peace” must be secured at all times. According to the Guidelines, protection of education extends beyond school hours and during breaks. Essentially, schools are always expected to be zones of peace. In oPt, a lack of resources has limited schools from being protected when classes are not in session. School infrastructure can become damaged or destroyed and it is frequently unsafe for child resilience sessions to be held during non-school hours. This displays areas for improvement to fully satisfy the guidelines. With additional resources, schools could ensure security at all times.

- Linking with other programs: One of the primary obstacles faced by communities has been the lack of resources needed to protect children and schools. This has been common across both oPt and DRC, and will continue to be challenging in the many contexts afflicted by both poverty and conflict such as South Sudan and Niger. To remedy this issue a potential solution is to introduce SZOP projects in schools that have already benefited by, or are currently benefitting from other programs. The situation in DRC provides an example of how integrating projects can be advantageous. When SZOP was coupled with
EiE programming, schools were able to meet their material needs. Therefore, it is recommended that SZOP be implemented with complementary existing programming. By linking SZOP with other programs or projects, resources can be combined and circumstances enriched for activities to unfold.

**Theme: Coordination of partners**

- Engaging Child Protection Sub-Cluster: In both oPt and DRC it has been effective to engage the education cluster in SZOP activities. Working groups in each country have contributed towards project goals. However, although the education cluster has been thoroughly engaged, the child protection sub-cluster has only minimally been involved. Although EiE and CPiE have different priorities, concerns, and methods of addressing children’s needs, they share many common goals. In practice, these fields often complement each other but potential for deeper interaction remains. The SZOP projects in oPt and DRC represent this potential. In both countries, the project has largely been an education initiative that has engaged education actors as the majority of stakeholders. However, the core aim of SZOP is essentially protecting children and schools. Therefore, space remains to engage more actors from child protection, particularly the child protection sub-cluster. Although elements of CP are found in project activities, little coordination is found. Closer integration of EiE and CPiE can produce greater effectiveness and deepen project impact.

**Theme: Advocating for policy change**

- Providing a Planning Framework: The work accomplished in oPt serves as a model for encouraging policy change. At the time of this report the MEHE was developing a comprehensive policy for introduction across all Palestinian schools. To encourage this process, SC developed a concept note that served as a planning framework for the MEHE. This concept note has been vital in transitioning SZOP principles into policy. It is recommended that concept notes or planning frameworks be offered to all MOEs participating in SZOP activities when policies do not already exist.

| Recommendations               |  |
|-------------------------------|  |
| **Continuing & improving current practice** | **Expanding current practice** |
| **Addressing definitions of “attacks”** | **Create measures of progress at school level** |
| *Communities require more thorough training on what constitutes an “attack” on education. Specifically, addressing that attacks may come from an array of perpetrators is needed.* | *Schools struggled to understand progress, limiting their confidence for future involvement in the project. To increase sustainability, communities must be able to evaluate their successes.* |
| **Affirming anonymity of reporting** | **Extending the “zone of peace”** |
| *Community members expressed fear of retribution if reports were identifiable to them. Anonymity of reporting should be re-verified and results expressed to the community.* | *When children recounted violations that they commonly experienced, most occurred off school grounds. Therefore, a need to consider providing resources or interventions beyond the school walls is beneficial.* |
Considerations

As part of the scope of the evaluation, research targeted factors for global scale up. The previous section offered recommendations for a global approach—these were offered as specific concrete measures, but more theoretical issues remain. As the SZOP project continues to be introduced in new countries, some broad

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<th>Linking SZOP with other programs</th>
<th>Information dissemination strategies</th>
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<td>Across contexts, schools cited a need for material resources and (sometimes) additional trainings to strengthen security. It would be beneficial to link SZOP with programs that can help provide these resources.</td>
<td>During field research, stakeholders involved in SZOP activities were generally knowledgeable of the project; however, information rarely disseminated to wider communities. Stronger strategies such as engaging journalists or developing peer to peer networks for students would benefit project goals.</td>
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<th>Engaging Child Protection sub-cluster</th>
<th>Gender sensitive programming</th>
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<td>SZOP strives to fortify referral pathways and ensure child protection. Historically, the project has engaged the education cluster, but greater coordination with the child protection sub-cluster would also benefit the project and add expertise.</td>
<td>SZOP activities could be expanded to address how girls and boys experience conflict differently. In an ad hoc meeting in DRC, girls were encouraged to report sexual violence since this issue was historically under-reported. Community members stated a need for gender sensitive programming to address such issues and more. Although some work has already occurred on this topic (particularly in DRC), gender-sensitive approaches could be more pervasive.</td>
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<th>Providing a planning framework for policy formation</th>
<th>Seek local partners for engaging duty-bearers</th>
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<td>Ministries of education have been receptive to the project and indicate a desire to create policy. Providing a planning framework serves as a foundation for this process to occur.</td>
<td>To fully promote the Guidelines, all parties to conflict should be engaged in SZOP activities. This is challenging for myriad reasons and some countries have been more successful than others. Looking forward, one area to probe is involvement of local partners. In the case of oPt, liberal Israeli NGOs have potential to engage the IDF when Palestinians cannot (inevitably may not be possible but worth investigating). In DRC, involving local partners may make activities more sustainable (since a foreign NGO currently leads this effort).</td>
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<th>Increasing child participation</th>
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<td>All stakeholders made a request to increase child participation. This could occur through incorporating more children into leadership roles, developing child sub-committees, and promoting dissemination of knowledge to the wider student population (via peer to peer networks).</td>
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considerations may need to be addressed. The following provides closing thoughts on some considerations for future engagement of the work.

**Addressing politicized communities**

A consideration that must occur across country contexts is the political nature of schools and communities. It must be recognized that schools are often unable to separate themselves from politics, which adds a complicating factor to the SZOP project. Schools, especially public institutions, are typically used to convey norms of citizenship and social interaction. They can serve as “devices of cultural reproduction” ensuring continuation of ideas into the next generation. Alternatively, schools can also become places where new perspectives are introduced and thus, become sites of struggle and liberation. This occurred in Nepal prior to implementation of the SZOP project—Maoists attempted to change curriculum to erase references to the monarchy and support their own political ideology. In contexts afflicted by conflict, schools are often a place of ideological tensions where political views emerge in classroom dialogue, are extended by teachers, or are presented in curricula.

In oPt, education has become a way to extend the Palestinian identity and history of struggle to a new generation. Education provides an avenue for culture and heritage to live on in a context where it is consistently challenged by the occupation. As a result, schools celebrate holidays that mark important moments in Palestinian history but are often controversial to Israeli counterparts. They allow posters of martyrs to be placed on buildings and observe strikes and protests through cancellations of classes. Schools are part of the struggle for Palestinians to maintain their identity and celebrate their history.

“During strikes or demonstrations, the students don’t come but the teachers do. This isn’t specific to our school, it’s what happens in all schools in the West Bank. For example, right now there are Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike so school was cancelled after the first class to show solidarity. The teachers also had to go to the mosque to show support.” - Teacher, Nablus, oPt

In DRC, teachers, school staff, and parents frequently hold political views tied to the conflict or have served as soldiers in rebel groups. In some cases, schools have recognized ANSAs as “protectors” of their communities leaving potential for under-reporting of violations when limits of acceptable behaviour become blurred. In many ways, politicized parents and other adults create challenges to ensuring protection of children and education given the complex interplay of political identities, loyalties, and social norms in communities.

Schools and communities are inherently political spaces. This point is presented here not with the intent of advocating for change, but rather a point of consideration for the SZOP project. Schools that display political messages such as martyr posters may be seen as adversarial. At the same time, this action may be important for preservation of cultural identity. In cases where parents are overtly political, further work may be needed with regards to understanding and reporting violations. The situations in oPt and DRC exemplify a critical point: the political nature of schools can obscure project goals or increase threats, while at the same time embody important aspects of culture and values.

One method of addressing political issues is to increase community awareness campaigns about SZOP principles and engage stakeholders in dialogue on the topic. These activities can make clear the impact of

politics on education and offers a wider scope to view the project. Addressing these issues when creating CoCs also holds potential because it establishes concrete standards regarding how/when schools are politicized. As was the case in Nepal, CoCs were established during public hearings when community members engaged to discuss the impact of armed conflict on schools. These hearings were closely followed by local media and broadcast on radio and printed in newspapers. Meetings modelled as public hearings or town halls created a democratic space to address sensitive political issues.

Protection vs. Protection & Transformation approaches

Over the last two decades the SZOP project has evolved and the new directions deserve pause for reflection. Particularly, when comparing projects from the early 2000s to the present, it is found that the approach has evolved from one solely focused on protection to one promoting both protection and transformational aspects. This evolution in project design elicits a question of if broadening the scope lessens effectiveness, or if it provides for a more comprehensive response.

The earliest SZOP projects in Nepal and Sri Lanka incorporated aims and activities with the sole purpose of strengthening school protection. The project in Sri Lanka involved only the construction of school boundary walls while Nepal focused on gaining commitments from Maoists to protect schools by not bombing, attacking, or co-opting them for military use. The project progressed and was introduced to Afghanistan in 2013, where it also focused on protection efforts by emphasizing CoCs and spreading awareness through a provincial SZOP network and Educational Journalists Group.

In the more recent projects to be piloted in the post-SSD era, the approach has begun to expand. Elements of transformative learning and conflict transformation are now being introduced. In DRC, the MOE has noted the SZOP project will be linked to current peace education programming. It has previously also been linked to programs for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Rehabilitation (DDR) of child soldiers. In oPt, child resilience has promoted peaceful interactions, positive attitudes towards others, and positive expectations for the future61. CR has assisted children in developing skills to lead productive lives and promoting measures of peace. Lastly, when the revitalized SZOP project was conceived in the aftermath of the SSD, it was anticipated that it would phase in Conflict Sensitive Education (CSE), which has transformative elements such as efforts to minimize the negative impacts of education programming. CSE is yet to be introduced as part of the SZOP project but if it is indeed included, it will further display expansion of the scope of the work. These types of activities promote an inner awareness among children and help to ensure cycles of conflict do not continue. The aim of such activities is transformative in nature.

The evolution of the SZOP approach is noted here for consideration of a critical point of concern: does a wider scope detract from the goals of the project? On one hand, SZOP objectives could be considered obscured by the dilution of activities focused on protection. On the other hand, incorporation of these transformative elements creates a more comprehensive project. This question must be problematized as the project is seen at the global level as practical approach on how to operationalize the SSD at school/community/national level and continues to be introduced into new contexts. For purposes of global scale up, the approach should be clearly defined.

Through focus group and interview data, it can be concluded that communities fully embrace the transformative aspects. CR was cited as highly effective in oPt and DDR well received in DRC. However,

incorporating these aspects has also been financially costly and can detract from much needed infrastructure support. Therefore, the pros and cons of an evolved approach must be weighed carefully.
Annex I – Case Studies (oPt & DRC)

The Occupied Palestinian Territories, A Case Study

Status of Children and Education in oPt

For half a century Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank including East Jerusalem have been subject to the occupation of Israeli forces. Since 1967, the occupation has produced recurrent conflict and periods of extreme violence. For children, the situation is especially damaging. Their rights, including the right to education, are consistently violated as they endure armed conflict, military incursions, and physical and psychological violence.

Attention to child rights in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) has grown in recent years. According to UNICEF (2010), occupation policies and practices actively increase the vulnerability of children to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation62. In 2013, the U.N. published a report on the situation of military detention of Palestinian children by Israeli forces and called for greater compliance with international standards of protection. Violations to rights have been increasingly exposed but progress for children has remained slow without practical interventions and measures of accountability.

Particularly, the right to education has been consistently undermined. An array of threats impedes Palestinian children's ability to reach and remain in school safely. These threats impact physical and psychological wellbeing as well as deteriorate confidence for making it to school unharmed. In the period prior to the introduction of SZOP in oPt, data provided by the Israel/oPt Working Group on Grave Violations against Children (which monitors, verifies and documents incidents of grave violations against children and provides information to a variety of partners including the Education Cluster), documented 321 incidents of attacks on schools across the whole of the oPt in 2012 alone.63 The following year in 2013, Save the Children conducted a baseline study where it was found that 37% of interviewed students in oPt felt unsafe in their school and/or on their commute.64 When accessing education, Palestinian children encounter myriad obstacles that put their security at risk and weaken confidence for getting to school safely.

In 2015, the Palestinian Authority (PA) signed the Safe Schools Declaration to affirm their commitments to protecting education from attack. Recognizing that progress must be made to ensure children the right to safe learning environments, it was a step towards enacting change. Alternatively, Israel has yet to sign the declaration and continues to be the primary duty bearer of violations against schools. This has been a major obstacle to achieving the goals of the SSD, and although progress has been made, it remains an inhibiting factor of success.

Threats to Children and Education in oPt

In the early stages of the SZOP project, communities mapped risks to education. Mapping risks assisted in guiding project activities. These risks displayed the core challenges faced by schools and provided targets for intervention by the SZOP project. During focus group discussions, participants recounted the mapping activity to display the scope of the problem.
To understand the threats to education, three categories help to organize the responses of school community members. Threats occurring on school grounds include external factors of military and settler intrusions, vandalism, and tear gas attacks. Additionally, internal threats exist such as poor infrastructure, natural hazards, and schools are not equipped with adequate support systems that include counselors or health teams. Threats occurring off school grounds (typically en route to and from school) include military detention, harassment, and physical violence. Lastly, factors that increase threats to safety and educational access include area C restrictions, distance travelled between school and home, and insufficient school facilities that cause students to leave school grounds to meet basic needs.

Organizing threats to children and education in this manner is valuable as it foremost challenges the notion of what constitutes a “zone of peace”. Establishing an understanding that a vast amount of violations occur both on and off school grounds opens the opportunity to consider expanding the “zone” beyond school walls. Additionally, identifying factors that increase threats assists in developing more comprehensive preventative measures.

**Threats Occurring Within School Boundaries**

**Military & Settler Intrusions** The intrusion of military personnel and settlers onto school grounds can have negative impact on both the physical and psychological state of children. Intrusions occur for a variety of reasons including intimidation of students by settlers and more commonly for soldiers to converse with school administration.

**Vandalism** Acts of vandalism by settlers is an inhibitor of consistent access to education. Especially, during periods when school is out of session and buildings are unmonitored by school staff, vandalism can occur that damages infrastructure. This can result in limited space and resources for education, as well as leaves a psychological impact on children as a visual reminder of the conflict and occupation.

**Tear Gas Attacks** When tear gas is launched at or in the vicinity of schools it permeates air causing a choking sensation and leaving impacted individuals temporarily incapacitated. This often necessitates early release from classes.

**Internal Threats** (Infrastructure, Natural Hazards, Lack of Support Network) In some cases, schools have dangerous infrastructure such as stairways with no railings or broken gates. Falling trees and rocks among other natural hazards are also problematic, and schools sometimes lack support networks including counselors and nurses to assist children. These issues easily go overlooked given more overt threats of harm produced by the occupation.

**Threats Occurring Beyond School Boundaries**

**Detainment** Arrests and detention of students by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) can have severe short and long-term impacts. In an immediate sense, when children are detained they miss out on important educational time. Detainment periods can vary from a few hours to multiple days creating a major obstacle to educational access. In the long term, children may end up with a permanent record of the offense resulting in court appearances and potential lifelong implications such as restrictions on travel.

**Harassment** Issues of harassment by soldiers and settlers is a pervasive problem that leaves children bewildered, fearful, and without confidence to continue attending school. Children can encounter settlers who attempt to provoke them into violence via verbal abuse or physical altercation. Soldiers also engage in harassment, which is contradictory given that soldiers sometimes have the task of escorting children to school in areas with high populations of settlers.
Factors that Increase Risks to Safety and Educational Access

Area C Restrictions In the West Bank, area C communities endure the greatest exposure to safety concerns and threats to education. Due to the pervasive authority of the IDF in these communities and restricted access of Palestinian police, schools encounter consistent threats with few avenues of protection.

Distance The distance traveled by students to and from school increases chances of altercations with settlers and military forces. Children have described instances when soldiers or settlers have waited along their route to harass and discourage them from continuing on. These instances can lead to detainment when violence erupts or stones are thrown. The greater the distance children must travel, the higher the potential for altercations to unfold.

Insufficient Facilities The lack of sufficient school facilities increases the risk of harm to students since it often forces them to leave school grounds. When schools lack functioning water sources and availability of food options, children must leave school to satisfy these needs. Children may go out to purchase lunch or visit neighboring schools to use toilets—this issue is especially problematic for menstruating females. The time outside the school walls exposes children to greater risks.

Overall, threats to child safety and educational access are overwhelming for many schools. Children are at constant risk of both physical and psychological harm from settlers and military forces. Coordinated efforts are needed to address these risks and without action, the security situation will remain precarious for many children.

SC’s Response: Schools as Zones of Peace

To ensure that children can thrive in environments free from violence and suitable for learning, Save the Children has introduced the Schools as Zones of Peace project in oPt. The project has been contextualized to fit the unique context and supports the Palestinian Authority to meet commitments made towards the Safe Schools Declaration. The following elaborates on how the project has been contextualized in oPt and provides details on the unique activities carried out at each level of engagement (school/community, national, and international). Following the description of SZOP activities in oPt, a discussion is offered with key considerations regarding opportunities for enhanced programming and conceptual issues that impact the aims of the project.

Contextualizing SZOP for an Interstate Protracted Conflict

The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians presents several distinct characteristics in comparison to the other countries introduced to SZOP. Specifically, the primary duty bearer producing threats to education and child safety is a state authority engaged in military occupation. Unlike countries like Niger or DRC where perpetrators are typically armed non-state actors that remain elusive or hidden from national authorities (government forces may also violate schools though less frequently), oPt is under wide scale military occupation by a neighboring state. Consequently, the situation in oPt has elicited unique obstacles and considerations for introduction of the SZOP project.

Foremost, the situation of an interstate conflict has precipitated greater efforts to involve the international community. Time has shown that enduring tensions between Israelis and Palestinians have made little progress without interventions by other national authorities (e.g. Oslo Accords, 1993; Road Map for Peace, 2003). Making progress towards peace has
historically relied on the participation of international governments. Consistent with this line of thinking, the SZOP project has included efforts to increase advocacy at that international level as a method to ensure progress is both achieved and sustainable. Ultimately, the advocacy campaign has aimed to pressure Israel to support the SSD and engage with the Palestinian Authority to protect schools from attack.

To produce a foundation for advocacy, reports of violations at the local and national level have been essential. Transferring information from schools to national authorities to international forums has been a key activity of the project. In oPt, trainings on the MRM for local communities has been important for publicizing violations while ensuring parallel mechanisms are not created. Save the Children is not responsible for managing the MRM database and conveying information to the U.N. but encouraging reporting helps to elicit action by the U.N. and reports may also be used as evidence in discussions with other stakeholders and international authorities. Therefore, contextualizing the SZOP project to the situation of protracted interstate conflict in oPt has meant all levels of project implementation have needed to be engaged in a collaborative advocacy effort. Specifically, the MRM plays a valuable role on different levels in planning for interventions and programming. Although it is a U.N. sponsored mechanism, it is an important part of the SZOP strategy in oPt. These efforts at long-term progress have been vital to gaining community investment.

The circumstances of oPt also create an obstacle in the fact that the duty-bearer of violations, Israel, is not involved in the project. According to the Guidelines, armed parties to conflict must commit to protecting schools and avoid impinging on students’ safety and education. As such, contextualizing the SZOP project to oPt has endured challenges to community investment since progress is questionable without participation from all sides of the conflict. To circumvent this issue, SZOP in oPt has focused on building the capacity of schools and students to respond to threats. Efforts to negotiate with armed groups, which has been a common approach in alternative SZOP-implementing countries, has shifted entirely to a focus on capacity building and advocacy.

Lastly, to gain investment of national authorities, the SZOP project had to find ways to align with the political narrative of the Palestinian people. Although the PA had already become a signatory to the SSD, it remained a struggle to get support of key ministry members in the initial phases of the project. Particularly, tensions with terminology on how to describe the situation in oPt became an early point of contention. The SSD is aimed at schools threatened by “armed conflict” rather than “occupation.” This problem of vernacular created discord between proponents of the project and ministry staff. Offering support for a project that reframed the occupation as armed conflict was considered an insult to the Palestinian struggle. Over the course of time, Save the Children staff was effective in conveying the fact that by international definitions, occupation is a form of armed conflict. Providing documentation on this matter and continuing to emphasize the goals of the SSD and SZOP inevitably resulted in national commitments of support for the project.

The situation in oPt has been a unique context to introduce the SZOP project. It contains distinct contextual features unseen in other programs (primarily occupation-related factors such as area C restrictions). Although oPt contrasts significantly from other implementing countries, it still adds value to the learning around the SZOP project globally. Lessons learned from oPt provide insights on alternative plans for when the duty-bearer cannot be initially engaged, strategies for coordinated advocacy campaigns, and methods of sustainability met through national policy reforms.

Despite the unique challenges in oPt, the project has been successfully introduced to many of the most vulnerable schools. Presently SZOP has been implemented in 22 schools total, 10 of which were originally supported through an ECHO award and subsequently buttressed by additional Norwegian MFA funds. These schools were selected for piloting the project since they experience some of the highest rates of violence the West Bank (SZOP has not yet been introduced to Gaza). All schools are located in area C communities and endure constant threats to child safety and wellbeing.

**SZOP Activities by Level**
A defining attribute of the SZOP project broadly is the multilevel engagement model. Organizing action at the local (school and community), national, and international level is important for a comprehensive response. In oPt, this model has developed over the course of the last few years to not only engage but coordinate activities in a complex web of interaction and support. Each level has been critical to the success of the project and helps to sustain the work of other levels. The following provides a breakdown of activities at the school, national, and international levels.

At the School Level

Strengthening the capacity of schools to mitigate and prevent threats is arguably the most valuable component of SZOP program activities. Action at other levels is also essential but schools are the sites where violations unfold, and therefore require immediate interventions. To promote SZOP principles at the school level, three primary activities have been supported in oPt: 1. Establishing school disaster management committees, 2. Providing programming to build child resilience for mitigating the effects of conflict and 3. Strengthening monitoring and reporting of violations.

School disaster management committees (SDMCs), otherwise known locally as “crisis cells”, have been an important first step in improving child protection. Schools describe SDMCs as the central coordinating mechanism for project activities and spreading awareness. The SDMCs have become an important focal point for child protection and helping to organize protocols for addressing violations. The committees are unique because they are guided by a clear mandate to protect education from attack with all activities centered on this goal. Unlike utilizing PTAs or other school committees to coordinate the SZOP project, the SDMCs have been developed with one directive and as a result the focus is undiluted by other school issues.

The installation of SDMCs has been a new component to the SZOP project following the SSD. It is currently being piloted in Niger and oPt. It has been particularly useful in oPt since the project focus has largely been to increase school capacity to respond to and prevent crisis, rather than pursue negotiations with parties to the conflict. Some of the effective practices of the SDMCs have been to select key members and ensure multi-stakeholder involvement, to link the committee to the community, and to phase turnover of members. Opportunities for enhanced work include increased child and parent participation.

Selecting the SDMC: This has been the task of school administrations, namely principals. With guidance from partner NGOs, schools have invited a variety of stakeholders to be trained and participate on the committee. The entire SDMC receives training support from a partner NGO, while teachers receive additional training from the MEHE. Although the SDMC receives the most thorough training, all school staff are oriented on the project. Typically the SDMC is a body of 11-13 people who have been strategically selected. The composition includes students, teachers, school staff, parents, community members, and the principal.

Schools claimed it has been valuable to have community leaders or people with decision-making power participate. These individuals can mobilize community resources when needed such as materials to repair school boundary walls. They act as a bridge between schools and families by encouraging stronger parent participation and they spread awareness of project activities through social networks. In many of the schools visited for the research, a local imam was included in the project as a way to share information with the community. In one school, the imam was given the title of “media outreach coordinator.” The inclusion of people who can be characterized as “resource mobilizers” or “local influencers” has been an effective strategy in developing SDMCs and creates a strong link to the greater community.

Among school staff, members have also been strategically selected. It has proven beneficial to include people with skill sets that can contribute to the project directly. For example the school counselor and custodian are typically invited to join the
SDMC. The counselor can offer children valuable care and strategies for mitigating the psychological effects of the conflict. The custodian has access to all school buildings and knowledge of water, power, systems, etc. In the case of an imminent threat or unfolding violation, the custodian is an important actor in ensuring preparedness of the school itself. Teachers also comprise a large component of the SDMC. Principals varied in their approaches of selecting teachers. Some chose to invite active teachers who would enthusiastically contribute, while others chose to select less active teachers as a way to motivate their participation in protecting the school environment.

Children were cited as having an essential role in the SDMC. Typically only 2-3 students were invited to join although they are an important component for coordination and awareness among the student population. Child SDMC members attended meetings and provided feedback. They also shared information with other students during morning announcements. In addition, inclusion of children on the SDMC was important so students had a peer to address issues with when adult guidance was not initially desired. In many instances, children expressed that more students should be included on the SDMC. Limiting the number to 2 or 3 is insufficient for gaining quality feedback and inclusion of more children would ensure that activities are not only child-centered but child driven as well.

To address concerns of low student involvement, some schools developed sub-committees where each of the child SDMC members lead a student group aimed at a particular intervention such as fire safety, documentation of violations, etc. This modification to the SDMC has incorporated more students and encouraged greater dialogue about safety. Lastly, it was expressed by a focus group that those students selected for the SDMC must represent each gender (in at least one case, only girls had been selected). Boys expressed discomfort in having to recount humiliating experiences for female students. They requested to elect a male student SDMC member who could take their thoughts to committee meetings when necessary. In this instance, boys still had access to male adult members of the SDMC, yet wanted to see parity among student representatives.

Lastly, parents served on the SDMCs as a liaison between schools and communities. It was intended that parents on the SDMC would assist in mobilizing other parents in moments of crisis, such as calling on mothers to plead with soldiers when children were detained. Unfortunately, parent participation in SDMCs has struggled since inception of the project. During discussion groups with parents this issue was addressed and they cited primary limitations as distance, school access, and general apathy.

In many instances, schools serve multiple communities and are located in areas between villages in order to serve all the students. Unfortunately, not having schools embedded into communities created space for more violations to occur, but the distance parents must travel also inhibited them from involvement in project activities. In addition, school access was an issue in communities where Israeli checkpoints controlled who could enter and exit the roads and paths leading to schools. In Hebron, parents stated the checkpoints delayed them from getting to school, were humiliating, and in some cases parents' names were not on the access list. The limitations of parents are often overwhelming and getting to school is considered too burdensome to participate in SZOP activities.

**Benefits of SDMCs:** In oPt, the SDMCs have been effective in spreading awareness and coordinating activities. Foremost, they brought structure and organization to efforts aimed at crisis response. School communities highlighted that capacity building within the SDMCs has strengthened confidence and created a sense that responses are a coordinated effort. Prior to the SZOP project, only a single teacher or principal typically responded to an incident.

Schools claimed that through the work of the SDMCs, protocols have now been put in place where roles and actions are clearly defined. For example, when a child is detained, a teacher is sent to immediately assist while another teacher is called to substitute the class. At the same time, the principal and other SDMC members are tasked with contacting appropriate authorities, and the children who were with the detained child have been instructed on how to stay calm,
avoid harm, and support one another. The network of support has resulted in heightened confidence to mitigate effects of the occupation.

Looking forward with the SDMCs: The current work has been strong but offers room for enhanced programming. As emphasized earlier, the participation of children could be increased and factors limiting parent involvement further addressed. Additionally, turnover of members posed some challenges. The SDMCs used an effective method of phased transitions, meaning only a fraction of the committee turned over each year. This enabled maintenance of institutional knowledge; however, new SDMC members requested SZOP refreshers because they felt they had weaker knowledge than others.

Child Resilience (CR) programming has been the second key component to the project at the school level in oPt. Uniquely, oPt has been the first and only place to implement CR in conjunction with the project. Linking the work was natural given conditions at inception of the project. Prior programming around child rights governance (CRG) and the Protective Sphere project helped to provide a focus on empowering Palestinian youth. These programs with the influence of a Save the Children staff member focused on resilience helped to contextualize the SZOP project so that CR was a valuable part of activities.

CR sessions involved a select group of children at each school, two teachers appointed as co-facilitators, and partner NGO field coordinators. Prior to sessions commencing with children, field coordinators were trained by Save the Children staff on how to deliver principles successfully. Teachers also consistently received trainings to ensure they understood all aspects of resilience and wellbeing. These teachers attended CR sessions with the expectation they would gradually take over facilitating responsibilities from the field coordinators.

Across all contexts, the intent of child resilience programming has been to go beyond addressing a child's wellbeing to provide them skills and empower them to overcome challenges. It is a nonclinical psychosocial and protection methodology that focuses on children's positive coping and resilience. The program in oPt is comprised of 12 structured sessions, led by trained facilitators that help children to understand concepts like peaceful interaction, problem solving, and enhanced capacity and awareness about self-protection and protection of peers.

In oPt, CR has helped to build confidence in children to withstand confrontations by soldiers and settlers. It has also given children a platform to discuss the conflict and speak about their feelings. As part of the SZOP project, CR goes beyond addressing external threats to children, to also ensure children have the skills to mitigate conflict internally.

Over the course of three years, the CR program has been adapted and taken different approaches in oPt. Initially the program added a summer camp to supplement learning gained from the sessions. In the following year logistical issues precipitated changing the summer camp to periodic field trips. In the last year of the project, field trips had been phased out and "child-led initiatives" had been introduced. Some of the child-led initiatives have included improving school canteens to support better nutrition and school clean ups to encourage positive sanitation practices. Principals and teachers have been strong proponents of the child-led initiatives because it helps children to engage what they learned in CR sessions in a tangible and relevant way. Over the course of three years, the CR programming has evolved to maximize effectiveness and child-led initiatives have been a key example of this.

Benefits & Challenges of CR: CR programming has been well received by students who claim it has given them confidence to continue attending school. Teachers, parents, and principals alike confirm that CR has been essential in building capacity.

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within children to mitigate conflict. Although CR is highly valued among school communities, feedback was given regarding how it can be improved. Specifically, engagement of only a small subset of the student population has created obstacles. Students feel the program is exclusive and selection is not conducted through democratic processes. Some students conveyed that the timing of CR sessions during the school day is also not ideal. Students must miss classes to attend CR sessions since staying after school may pose a threat to student safety. SC and partner NGOs have tried to address the lost class time by working with principals to schedule CR sessions when students are either on break or in classes where an absence will not disrupt learning such as physical education. Nonetheless, students who attend sessions cite the missed class time as an area for improvement and claim inclusion of all students could eliminate this issue.

Teachers also claim there is room for CR to be more effective by incorporating resilience training for school staff as well as students. Teachers endure many of the same threats as children including harassment and detention by military, searches, and physical violence. Teachers must overcome these obstacles and be able to teach effectively. Unfortunately, many teachers struggle to mitigate the psychological impact of the conflict and release their tensions on children. They claim promoting “teacher resilience” is also important in establishing safe and peaceful spaces for children. SC offers teachers a training on stress management, but more work needs to occur in this area.

The request of teachers is not entirely novel. According to initial CR projects developed by Save the Children Denmark, resilience programming was intended to be conveyed among multiple stakeholder groups (namely children, caregivers and community members) with a focus on understanding child wellbeing and protection. The approach was holistic and involved inclusion and training of adults as well as children. Although CR did not unfold this way in oPt, SC has begun developing options to address the impact of conflict on teachers and how they engage with children. It is anticipated that a program focused on “positive discipline” will be carried out in the next phase of the SZOP project.

**Looking forward with CR:** All stakeholders have recognized the value in continued programming. CR offers children rich psychosocial support and avenues to apply the skills they learn. To accomplish this, the program has focused on quality over quantity with only a portion of the student population engaged at each school. In order to deeply address the traumas and challenges children experience due to the occupation, it has been helpful to recognize the benefits of limiting child participation in CR sessions to offer ample attention and time between facilitators and students.

Going forward, it is recommended that the focus on quality remain, with comprehensive support given primarily to the most vulnerable students as well as selected students with positive potential for leadership. If funding allows, all students should be offered the opportunity to benefit from the CR programming. However, it must be recognized that this is a costly component to the SZOP project and likely not a viable option. In this case, it is recommended that CR sessions stay restricted to a select group of students, but greater support could be given to child-led initiatives and peer-to-peer support networks at minimal cost. Children who participate in CR sessions have the potential to transfer skills to others and SC can enrich this process by encouraging the development of child-led initiatives as inclusive school-wide activities and creating stronger peer-to-peer networks of support. By making child-led initiatives inclusive of all students but led by CR participants, it creates potential for skills to be more widely disseminated. Peer to peer support networks may also transfer valuable skills learned through CR. Potentially this could be developed through children’s clubs or other student groups.

Regarding “teacher resilience,” more work needs to occur in this area. The capacity for teachers to mitigate conflict and not unleash tensions on students was cited as a missing project component by both SC staff and school level personnel. SC intends to remedy some of this issue with the introduction of “positive discipline” programs but at the time of data collection this had yet to occur. SC’s intent to provide teachers support in this area is a recommended action to establish a holistic approach to developing school wide resilience.
Monitoring & Reporting of violations has been the final piece of project activities at the school level. Prior to the SZOP project, various mechanisms were in place to report violations to children and schools. With the inception of SZOP, efforts were made to consolidate the mechanisms and improve efficiency and effectiveness of reports. The strengthening of a comprehensive monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) has been vital to the SZOP goals and significant attention has been given to training actors at the school level on its use.

In early 2017, the MRM was streamlined and transitioned into an online platform. The online MRM has allowed schools to more quickly report violations and ensure information is passed to government authorities. The MRM directly links schools with the field follow-up unit, a department within the Palestinian Authority MOE. The field follow-up unit is in charge of collecting information about violations and engaging the District Coordination Office (DCO) to negotiate on behalf of schools when necessary. Schools have reported that since the MRM went online, there have been instances when information was sent to the MOE and representatives have been able to arrive on site as the issue was unfolding. Typically, schools do not rely on the MOE to resolve incidents as they are occurring, the DCO is largely tasked with that, but support from the MOE is welcome at schools that have expressed low confidence historically.

Looking forward with the MRM: In discussions with school community members it was evident that the MRM was a symbol of hope since the data could be used for advocacy purposes. Schools have more vigorously adopted the SZOP project with the knowledge that their everyday realities may be understood by the international community. Emphasizing this point for future projects would assist in gaining investment. However, if there is no reduction in violations and the MRM data proves fruitless, schools may lose confidence in the project.

SZOP at the National Level

To build schools’ capacity to address threats to children and education, the MEHE and other national level authorities have been engaged. Over the last two years, SC has introduced the principles and guidelines of the Safe Schools Declaration to concerned institutions by developing a detailed concept note that offers comprehensive information as well as serves as a planning framework for supporting SZOP goals. Particularly, the MEHE, MoSD, DCI, DCO, and security forces have been targeted as valuable partners. Specific actions have included security forces developing and endorsing training guidelines regarding their responsibility to protect education from attack, coordination of various ministries to respond to reports of violations, and institutionalization of SZOP principles as national policy, a decision by the Minister of Education and Higher Education.

Involvement of national level authorities continues to evolve as the project is increasingly adopted by government ministries. Yet presently the most visible activities can be consolidated into three categories: resource allocation, coordination, and policy formation. In order to support schools with necessary resources to establish and strengthen protective environments, the MEHE has been a vital partner. The MOE has also coordinated follow up regarding violations and collaborates with the DCO to negotiate with the Israeli military. Lastly, the MOE has initiated work on the “Contingency Plan,” a national policy focused on improving school security.

Resource Allocation: As school communities increased awareness of child protection and school security, they worked to create solutions to counter threats. Many of these solutions called for external support, which was sourced from a multitude of actors including Save the Children, education cluster partners, and the MOE. The acquisition of both material resources and training support from national authorities and other partners helped schools to make tangible progress towards goals. Most notably, the MOE provided buses and cameras in efforts to strengthen school security. These provisions were not officially supported by the SZOP project, but nonetheless display how communities took on ownership and direction of the project.
When schools conducted risk and resource mapping, they comprehensively marked all threats to child safety. An interesting point to emerge was that the majority of threats were encountered beyond the school grounds. The most commonly cited dangers for children occurred en route between school and home. These risks included harassment by settlers and soldiers, detention, checkpoint searches, and the danger of crossing Israeli roads with fast moving traffic in order to get to school. Schools have tried to mitigate these risks on their own by stationing teachers and adults on the path to school or by creating walking groups accompanied by an adult, but violations were still occurring.

To assist schools on this issue, the MOE provided buses to safely transport students. The provision of buses for at-risk areas was occurring prior to the introduction of SZOP, but the project helped to identify more schools that would benefit from transportation and increased awareness among school communities to advocate for buses. Schools have cited that receiving this support from the MOE has been the most valuable factor of success for strengthening the protection of children.

The provision of buses in oPt elicits new considerations for the SZOP project. Typically, transportation has not been a component to project activities. Defining the “zone” has only considered the threats within school boundaries and not beyond. Therefore the situation in oPt, where threats are most commonly occurring before and after children arrive at school, creates new questions regarding how to define the “zone of peace.” In oPt, the zone has had to extend beyond school boundaries in order to effectively protect children.

Cameras have also been allocated by the MOE to strengthen school security. Over the last three years, the MRM has undergone continual improvements, one being the ability to upload photos and video for documentation purposes (as an extra feature). School communities have been trained on how to document violations and video surveillance is helpful to supplement those activities. In addition, the cameras are meant to deter potential violations from occurring. Visibility of the cameras provides a level of protection from perpetrators who do not want to be caught on tape. Like school buses, the provision of cameras was done outside of official SZOP activities and beyond the recommendations of Save the Children. Therefore is an unintended consequence of the project and displays one of the many ways that school communities and the MOE have adapted the project.

Cameras have helped to strengthen security in many ways, but communities have described them as a “double edge sword”. The cameras help to deter some offenses from occurring, but also encouraged intrusions by soldiers who demanded to see the footage. Principals noted numerous occurrences when soldiers entered school grounds to ask for the recordings. In many instances there was no immediate need to see the footage but soldiers used it as an excuse to intrude on school grounds. Therefore, the cameras in one sense helped to deter violations while in another sense rendered the school a target.

**Coordination:** Beyond resource allocation, the MOE has been a key actor in coordinating partners to protect children. The Field Follow Up Unit (within the MOE) has been tasked with being the primary point of contact for schools to report violations. The unit manages the MRM and receives incident reports regarding all violations to children in school (or en route). By monitoring violations, the unit understands the weaknesses in security according to each school and can provide better resources to strengthen the environments (e.g. buses). The unit also conveys reports of the six grave violations to the education cluster to increase advocacy and awareness of the realities existing for children in oPt. Lastly, the unit frequently engages the DCO to negotiate with Israeli military on behalf of children. Identifying and building a strong relationship with the Field Follow Up Unit has been an important factor of success.

**Policy:** The MOE has been an essential partner in SZOP activities. Resources and coordination provided from the national level have assisted schools in making progress. Yet, the most significant contribution has been efforts to ensure sustainability by institutionalizing SZOP principles into national policy.
In the last year, the MOE has initiated what is called the "Contingency Plan" which is the creation of policy targeted at better protecting schools. The policy was conceived following the launch of SZOP activities. The Contingency Plan is not a direct result of the SZOP project, the MOE has long understood the need to protect schools, but concepts promoted by SZOP have been absorbed in the planning for it and SZOP pilot schools now serve as the model. The Contingency Plan is still in development stages but is intended to be introduced across the whole of oPt and engage multiple ministries in the near future. It is a comprehensive effort at protecting education and a first of its kind measure for Palestinian schools.

SZOP at the International Level

In oPt, the SZOP project has extended to the international community. Historically, SZOP has engaged stakeholders at the school, community, and national levels with an absence of concerted efforts to involve international actors. In other country models, the international level has been indirectly involved as MRM data has been filtered upwards. Across some contexts, it has been sufficient to only minimally include the international community; however, the situation of interstate conflict in oPt has required otherwise. As a result, the project in oPt has been contextualized to include an advocacy effort that extends to the international community. Efforts aimed at engaging this level have included the establishment of an Education in Emergencies working group focused on advocacy, the convening of a coalition briefing in Jerusalem, and ensuring reports on the six grave violations against children are received by the U.N.

The advocacy sub-cluster was established in 2016 as a group dedicated to bringing attention to the situation of education and armed conflict in oPt. The group brings together lead agencies (UNICEF, NRC, World Vision, etc.) alongside education focused diplomatic missions (Belgium, Norway, Finland, Ireland). It provides an avenue for partners to discuss and strategize ways to protect schools from attack. Participants in the sub-cluster come from a variety of countries and have the potential to transfer information to national actors back home, including government officials and NGO headquarters staff.

In June 2017, Save the Children held a coalition briefing in Jerusalem aimed at sharing information regarding attacks at schools. Diplomats in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv were invited to learn about and discuss education related violations and recommendations for improving learning spaces. The briefing exposed the pervasive nature of attacks and encouraged action to protect children’s right to education.

Lastly, efforts to verify and extend information regarding the six grave violations against children have been an essential part of the project. The six grave violations were included in the U.N. Security Council’s first resolution on children in armed conflict (1999) and are documented through MRM data provided by schools. When these violations are verified, it results in inclusion in the Secretary General’s Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, which names parties to conflict and affirms violations to international law. Parties included in the report are requested to dialogue with the U.N. with the aim of negotiating action. Representing the culprits of violations occurring in schools at the international level builds momentum for much needed interventions. This philosophy has thoroughly been adopted in oPt.

Looking forward with activities at the international level: The SZOP project in oPt has uniquely incorporated efforts aimed at the international community. Transferring MRM data from the school level into international forums has been a key focus since inception of the project. However, major limitations exist. Foremost, the MRM in oPt is not officially sanctioned. Reporting in oPt is done voluntarily since it is considered a situation of concern and is yet to qualify for a formal MRM. This

means reporting of violations may not produce action by the U.N. to engage the duty-bearer of violations and creates challenges to advocacy aimed at involving the Israeli military. Without an official MRM, there is no accountability for the violations reported. Although many gains have been made regarding international level advocacy, a strategy to address the current limitations of the MRM and how to most effectively use the data would enhance the project. Strategic goals looking forward may encompass pressure on the U.N. to establish an official MRM, while also finding alternative ways to use the data such as reports or sharing information with global partners.

**Discussion**

**Positive Practices in oPt**

Although the SZOP project has been implemented under challenging circumstances, progress is evident. Now in the third year of project activities, the work has been refined and coordinated efforts display a clear theory of change for the oPt context. The oPt model operates with the assumption that (see table):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory of Change in oPt</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>If...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools build the capacity to be prepared for, respond to, and document violations, and Communities gain greater awareness of the threats to education and National authorities provide material supports and coordinate information sharing/advocacy and International actors advocate for interventions in oPt and for Israel to sign the SSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Then...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Violations against children/schools will be reduced and Less educational time will be lost due to the effects of occupation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>This will lead to...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The preservation of both schools and children as “zones of peace” and Greater confidence in schools and communities to prevent and mitigate conflict and More resilient children</td>
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</table>

The model displays directives at each level of engagement and anticipated results. Over the last three years, actors at the school, community, national, and international levels have been coordinated in an effort to meet project goals. Although it is difficult for many reasons to measure if violations are actually decreasing, the project has produced outcomes such as policy creation, protocols for response, and communities are reporting higher degrees of confidence for preventing and mitigating attacks. The project in oPt displays evidence of positive practices. Specifically, foremost strengths of the project have included, 1. Creating a strategy to link levels of engagement, 2. Using SDMCs as a central mechanism of capacity building, and 3. Supporting the establishment of policy to institutionalize SZOP principles.

Creating a strategy to link levels of engagement has been accomplished through coordinating advocacy efforts and use of MRM data, albeit unofficial. Schools are more vigorously documenting violations knowing this information is transferred to higher authorities. The MOE is then working to provide data on the six grave violations to Save the Children and other partners in order for it to be represented in international reports and forums to protect children. Linking the levels of engagement through a common advocacy effort has assisted in organizing stakeholders and strengthening networks of support.

Using SDMCs as a mechanism of capacity building has mobilized communities and established effective protocols for crisis response. Prior to installation of SDMCs, violations were resolved through ad hoc responses and uncoordinated efforts. With the SDMCs responses have become systematized through enacting protocols and...
educating stakeholders on roles and responsibilities for children.

Supporting policy creation to institutionalize SZOP principles has been a sign of national investment and sustainability of the project. Over the last year, the MOE has incorporated components of SZOP into a comprehensive new policy due to be released in 2017. Save the Children staff have contributed significantly to this effort by including national authorities in every part of the project and conveying planning documents and frameworks for guidance.

**Ongoing Challenges**

The situation of occupation provides stark challenges for protecting education from attack. The lack of engagement with the Israeli military and Jewish settlers creates a one-sided effort for ensuring the right to education is maintained. Although progress can be made with regards to capacity building and extending skills and resources necessary for protecting education, elimination of the threats that schools face cannot be remedied without participation from all parties to the conflict. Inevitably, this may lead to a loss of confidence in the project at local and national levels. Save the Children has attempted to address this issue by promoting advocacy to provoke action on the part of Israelis. However, this is a long-term strategy and the potential to lose confidence in the short term remains. The political situation is deeply challenging in oPt and solutions are not easy to find.

The situation in oPt is also an obstacle in the fact that it is not listed in Secretary-General’s annual report on children and armed conflict resulting in only unofficial recognition of MRM data. Once an official MRM is established, it has the mandate to monitor and report on all parties to the conflict. Documentation of violations also elicits negotiations with duty bearers. Unfortunately, oPt is considered a “situation of concern” and has yet to be recognized in the annual report on children and armed conflict and consequently, MRM data remains unofficial. This designation slows action to protect education from attack.

Lastly, the SZOP project is currently designed without sufficient allocation for hard resources such as infrastructural support, buses, and other material needs. The core aims of SZOP focus efforts on capacity building and advocacy. These have been valuable components to the project but without basic resources effectiveness may not be fully achieved. Teaching communities to assess threats to education and create solutions is important for progress, but when resources are absent that are essential for change, progress is limited.

**Recommendations and Opportunities for Deepened Impact**

The situation in oPt presents a unique and challenging context for introduction of the SZOP project. The widening occupation of Israeli forces and growth of Jewish settlements continues to pose threats to children and education. Lack of commitments by the Israeli government to support the Safe Schools Declaration has created the steepest challenge, but opportunities to deepen project impact exist in other ways. Particularly, efforts to expand and define the project can consider: 1. Extending the “Zone of Peace”, 2. Establishing Measures of Progress at the School Level, 3. Defining a Strategy for MRM data, and 4. Engaging the Duty-Bearer of Violations.

*Extending the “Zone of Peace”: During focus groups with children, it was consistently cited that a large portion of threats were occurring off school grounds. When children were en route between school and home, they were approached by settlers, soldiers, and sometimes experienced tear gas. Adults in focus groups often claimed that the provision of school buses by the MOE had been the most effective effort in protecting children and education.*
Consequently, this elicits a question of how the “zone of peace” has previously been defined and if an expanded definition is applicable. If interventions are required beyond the school boundary walls, then the “zone” should include the physical space of schools as well as the journey children must make to reach schools. A broad recommendation is to expand the “zones of peace” concept so that interventions can be considered for all places children experience threats.

It was also found that “zones of peace” must be secured at all times in oPt. According to the Guidelines, protection of education extends beyond school hours and during breaks. Essentially, schools are always expected to be zones of peace. In oPt, a lack of resources has limited schools from being protected when classes are not in session. School infrastructure can become damaged or destroyed and it is frequently unsafe for child resilience sessions to be held during non-school hours. This displays areas for improvement to fully satisfy the guidelines. With additional resources, schools could ensure security at all times.

**Establishing Measures of Progress at the School Level:** Presently, schools are in need of a method to understand progress. Without a framework to measure gains, school communities remain unclear on what they are accomplishing. A lack of guidance in this regard has led schools to develop their own understandings of progress, which may be detracting from project aims causing issues of sustainability.

During focus groups at schools, participants consistently referred to the lack of decreasing violations as a display of poor progress. In one focus group, a parent emphasized that they had adopted all the recommended activities and had vigorously reported incidents to the MRM. Yet, violations had not decreased so they could not count the project as a success. It was found that schools viewed progress solely by decreases in violations and increased interventions of the international community. These long-term goals of the project are yet to be met and as such, schools need methods to understand progress more immediately. One recommendation is for the SC MEAL team to work with schools on ways to understand progress in other ways. Measures of progress are vital to sustainability of the project.

**Defining a Strategy for MRM data:** As mentioned earlier in the report, the unofficial designation of MRM data is problematic for eliciting action on behalf of children. As part of advocacy efforts, attention could be given to strategies that would institute an official MRM reporting system. This would provide greater legitimacy of reports and ensure responses of the international community. In addition, development of a robust international advocacy plan would be useful going forward. Efforts to engage international actors have already been initiated with the coalition briefing in Jerusalem in June 2017 and establishment of the advocacy sub-cluster, but space remains for a comprehensive plan that would include a timeline and more defined theory of change.69

**Engaging the Duty-Bearer of Violations:** Lastly, continuing efforts to engage the Israeli military and Jewish settlers remains important. The lack of engagement with these parties to conflict limits the full potential of the project. Regarding Jewish settlers, Save the Children has attempted to involve Israeli human rights NGOs as intermediaries. Inevitably, this was not accomplished due to a variety of issues but potential still exists to pursue this avenue going forward. The Israeli military poses other obstacles. As noted, the absence of Israeli commitments to the SSD leaves little space for negotiations. However, one suggestion of Save the Children staff has been to consider the Civil Military Guidelines, an approach that has occurred in other country contexts (non-SZOP projects), to begin engagement of this group.

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69 Although advocacy is an essential component to the SZOP project, activities are not solely funded through ECHO
Democratic Republic of Congo, A Case Study

Status of Children and Education in DRC

For more than two decades, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has suffered from chronic emergency conditions due to frequent outbreaks of violent conflict in its eastern region. The most recent conflict recorded was the fighting between the government of DRC and the Congolese revolutionary Army also known as the March 23 Movement (M23) in North Kivu. M23 soldiers largely came from the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), which was a former Rwanda-backed rebel group that was later integrated into the Congolese army. According to the report by United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo (2012), the Rwandan government was directly involved with M23 overseeing operational planning, sending weapons and army troops, and training new recruits in the eastern Congo. In November 2012, M23 occupied the provincial capital Goma and the conflict spanned over a year until the peace agreement was signed in December 2013.

Bordering Rwanda, the province of North Kivu has been one of the most affected areas with ongoing reports of massacres, mass internal displacements, and grave violations against children and youth. The United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) quoted this area “the epicenter of violence.” In 2014, Education under Attack reported the estimation of 500 up to 999 attacks on education taking place in DRC between 2009 and 2013, which were mostly concentrated in the eastern region. According to the UNSG report on DRC in 2014, 180 schools were directly affected by the conflict between the year 2012 and 2013 with 47 of those being heavily damaged. Just the year 2013 alone, 95 attacks against school were reported and there were 25 incidents of military use of schools.

According to the UNSG’s report, the provinces of North and South Kivu accounted for more than half of the internally displaced population in DRC, between the year 2010 and 2013. Coupled with this are the extreme poverty and absence of government services that create situation where people suffer from malnutrition and chronic disease and children are unable to go to school. Schools for example were often the first public building to be occupied by internally displaced persons (IDPs) and armed groups frequently used them as their base of operations. School furniture and textbooks were burned as cooking fuel and latrines were hard to maintain in hygienic condition due to use by a larger population. Even when school was returned to children, school equipment disappeared and were often destroyed. Lack of education infrastructure, absence of government funding, and a poorly adapted curriculum were also significant barriers to children’s entry and completion of education.

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Threats to Children and Education in DRC

In addition to the occupation of schools by IDPs and armed groups, other threats surrounded children in and out of school. Consistent with the classification in the oPt study, threats in eastern Congo are also organized in three categories. Threats occurring on school grounds include internal factors of child abuse mostly through the corporal punishment given by teachers, ethnic discrimination and physical violence amongst the peer group, and dangerous infrastructure that are either destroyed or not properly built to meet the safety concerns. External factors mostly derive from the military use of schools, which is not limited to the presence of the rebel groups but also includes the police and national defense forces. Threats occurring off school grounds (typically en route to and from school) include child abduction and forceful recruitment, gender-based violence and other types of physical violence, and traffic accidents on the road. Lastly, factors that increase threats to safety and educational access include diverse types of natural hazards including volcano eruption, thunder lightning, and kids drowning in the nearby lake. The political unrest in DRC also increases tensions on school grounds with the civil society and protesters calling for school closures and attacking classrooms when schools are in session.

SC’s Response: Schools as Zones of Peace (SZOP)

Schools as Zones of Peace (SZOP) aims to secure children’s safety at school and intends to mitigate the situations where education is disrupted by the armed conflict. The project works with children, schools and local communities and engages in conversation with the local and national policymakers. In DRC, SZOP was first introduced in November 2015 and closed its cycle in June 2017. It was implemented in 30 schools in North Kivu, in educational subdivisions of Nyiragongo, Masisi and Masisi 3. Some of the school/community level activities included Children’s Clubs, Risk Mapping activities, Codes of Conduct, the reinforcement of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and community-based child protection networks, and radio messages on protection of schools from attacks. The partner NGO, Geneva Call, had been working directly with Armed Non-State Actors (ANSAs) increasing awareness and gaining commitments for protecting schools from attack. At the national level, Save the Children spearheaded a legal review searching for possible avenues to best implement the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), which was endorsed in DRC in July 2016.

In addition to the multi-level engagement model, which is a common structure across many SZOP projects around the world, the project in DRC emphasized investigating already existing practices to avoid creating parallel mechanisms. Instead, it tried to build on to what was already in place and find ways to reinforce and disseminate the information. For example, many of the SZOP activities such as the Codes of Conduct, reinforcement of PTAs, Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), Children’s Clubs, etc. existed prior to the intervention yet were strengthened throughout the project. In fact, the MRM in DRC has been active for the past 12 years yet the ongoing challenge was the lack of reporting, which led the project to focus on promotion and awareness raising of reporting rather than establishing a new mechanism.

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77 Ibid.
79 In DRC, PTAs were called “Comite des Parents” translated as “Parents committee” in English.
80 Taken from NMFA Final Report, 2016: Implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict through Schools as Zones of Peace.
81 Taken from NMFA Final Report, 2016: Implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict through Schools as Zones of Peace.
Contextualizing the SZOP framework for DRC

Similar to how SZOP was rolled out in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), SC DRC embarked on a multi-level engagement when SZOP was introduced in 2015. The model was again adapted and contextualized based on the characteristics of conflicts that were unique to DRC. First of all, the conflicts were clustered around the eastern region and this called for a strong buy-in from the provincial level. The vast size of DRC and the distance between Kinshasa (national level) and Goma (provincial level) necessitated more levels and detailed hierarchy of the engagement.

Moreover, the dominant perpetrators and violators of child protection and education were ANSAs, which led SC to partner with the Swiss NGO, Geneva Call (GC). Established in 2000, GC has expertise and multiple experiences working with ANSAs under volatile circumstances such as war zones and conflict affected areas where SC may have limited access to. Another aspect in DRC that merits attention was the nature of its conflict that is extremely rampant in and around the school community. That is, violence not only took place between the armed groups (ANSAs, police, and national defense forces) and civilians, but also it was evident between teachers and students, parents and children, and even amongst the peer group. Therefore the strong advocacy work on child rights, child protection, and its violation was required across all levels and all stakeholders.

The following section outlines the diverse activities that SC conducted to protect education from attack. Beginning with the school and community level and widening the scope to the provincial and national level, the section documents what went well with SZOP initiatives as well as some remaining challenges and implications for future implementation.

SZOP at the School Level

**Baseline Assessment, Risk Mapping, and Risk Reduction Plan:** The SZOP project is heavily contextualized meaning that by design, it intends to meet the needs of the affected population in the target area. In order to do so, SZOP embarks on a baseline study at the beginning of the project and assesses underlying vulnerabilities that affect school communities to inform and shape relevant activities\(^{83}\). The purpose of the baseline assessment is to map out the protection issues at the school level, situate them within the framework of existing policies, identify the gaps, and develop interventions. In DRC, all 30 schools conducted baseline studies with children, parents, community leaders, and local authorities and analyzed the situation at their schools. Later, it was followed up by a risk mapping activity and risk reduction plan where aforementioned focus groups were invited to identify the risks, discuss possible solutions and seek out available resources.

Across all the schools visited, the presence of armed groups was consistent as one of the major threats in schools of North Kivu (in order to qualify as participants in the SZOP project, school must have had encounters with the armed groups\(^{84}\)). What makes this activity ‘risk mapping’ rather than ‘conflict mapping’ is the inclusion of natural hazards, which were identified during the baseline assessment as another stream of major threats to the Congolese communities. Indeed, schools in North Kivu were the victims of various types of natural disasters ranging from volcanic eruptions of Nyiragongo, hurricanes, thunder lightening, to kids drowning in Lake Kivu.

After the threats were identified, the school community was asked to brainstorm available resources that could be used to prevent and mitigate the risks. In one case where the school community identified Lake Kivu as a

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\(^{83}\)Taken from NMFA Final Report, 2016: Implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict through Schools as Zones of Peace.

\(^{84}\)Interview with a SZOP coordinator and a MEAL officer in SC DRC
potential threat to school safety, teachers claimed that after the mapping activity they were advised to accompany kids at all times when there is a need to access the lake. Accidents on the main road were another risk identified in the same school. As part of the risk reduction plan, children were advised to stay in groups and watch both sides before crossing the road.

Looking Forward with Risk Mapping and Risk Reduction Plan: During the focus group discussions (FGDs) teachers added that the prevention practices from the risk reduction plan are temporary solutions and that infrastructural support must accompany these solutions. For example, installing school fences was often referred to as most needed infrastructure since it prohibits the access to the lake and prevents further accidents. In other cases, fences were needed to draw boundaries and define the school grounds. Teachers from a school in Nyiragongo expressed the urgent need for installation of school fences to prevent the access of soldiers. An armed group located nearby regularly visited the school to fetch water and often intimidated the children. Sometimes, the school site itself was identified as a threat to the children as many were damaged and destroyed by the occupation of armed groups. Moving forward, basic school rehabilitation would be useful as an accompaniment to the SZOP project. It could also be incorporated as part of the risk reduction plan.

Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) as well as Community-based Child Protection Networks were one of the key stakeholders that participated in the SZOP activities. Not only were they invited to the risk mapping/risk reduction plan but they were also trained on six grave violations, children’s rights, and most importantly the role that the community plays in terms of monitoring and reporting of child protection violations and attacks on education. PTAs in general consisted of 8 members under the leadership of 3 president/vice-presidents, secretary, cashier, and 2 advisors (the last person is assumed to be a general member). The membership is renewable after a year and they attend weekly meetings and occasionally hosted all parents’ meeting.

PTAs in the sample schools were mostly active in terms of providing an additional layer of support to child protection. Three out of five schools (one in Nyiragongo and two in Masisi 2) commented on the preparatory work carried out by the PTA and head teacher in the night before the school reopening. They convened to discuss and check the school facilities to verify whether the school was safe enough to host sessions. One school in Masisi 2 was located in front of the main road where accidents were identified as a major threat. As a response, the PTA advised the first graders’ parents to accompany their children on their way to and from school to ensure their safety. The PTA was also widely involved in dealing with conflicts in the classroom. For example, another PTA from a school in Masisi 2 hosted a meeting after a teacher filed a complaint about a student who was frequently late to class. She complained that the whole class gets delayed and it is difficult to proceed according to the lesson plan. The PTA invited the student, parents, teacher, and the members of the Children’s Club to discuss the issue and encouraged the student as well as the parents to help their child arrive on time.

Looking Forward with PTAs: Despite some of the noticeable engagement by the PTA members, it was found across all sample schools that parents and community members were the group of stakeholders that showed the least amount of knowledge and commitment to the project. Continued advocacy work with parents/community is critical in that some parents believed what takes place in school should be first managed within school. One parent noted, “Teachers are the first parents since they are the ones who stay in school while

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For instance the SZOP project in South Sudan which began in August 2016, has one of its program objectives to improve school infrastructure and ensure all children have access to safe and protective learning environment (Taken from NMFA Application, 2016: Enhancing Quality Education and Building Peace in South Sudan).

It is called Parents Committee (Comite des Parents) in DRC.
violence takes place, thus they need to be trained the most.” His intent was not to diminish the role of parents when conflict takes place but rather place heavier emphasis on the role of school staff.

Another interesting trend found within this group was that depending on the status of the parents – PTA vs. non-PTA member - they varied in their level of knowledge and commitment to the project. Within the group, parents who were not directly involved or newly involved with the PTA had the least knowledge. By design, this was not foreseen since PTA holds its weekly meetings and monthly meetings with all parents which provide sufficient opportunities for the new members to be filled in with program values and information. In reality, parents who were directly involved with SZOP activities, those invited as representatives, failed to diffuse the messages to others, yet consumed them as their own. This indicates the need for more communication and heavier emphasis on the dissemination strategy of SZOP activities.

Gaining community investment is a work in progress and requires long term commitments to advocate for deeper engagement in the protection of education. So far, as part of community outreach, the SZOP project has provided sensitization sessions, offered child plays in the community, aired radio messages, and shared articles in the local media. As was the case with parents, engaging community at large has also been a struggle since challenging and replacing a decades-long mind set require a dedicated time and effort. In other words, considering the intricate nature of the conflict and far shorter length of project roll out compared to that of the conflict in DRC, the community necessitates and calls for continued advocacy work for its deeper engagement. Nonetheless, a great deal of potential is found within the Congolese communities. For example, prior to the SZOP project when some students were abducted and forcefully enrolled in a rebel group, the school collaborated with the community to prepare three goats in exchange for the students (A school in Masisi 2). In another school when lightning struck, the community raised funds for the funerals for those affected. Later, the school was able to secure funding for a lightening rod from an international NGO under the leadership of the head teacher and PTA (A school in Nyiragongo). These examples speak for the inherent capacity of the Congolese communities and with the continued advocacy work, it is hopeful to yield some powerful impacts.

**Children’s Club (CC):** Children in the school community were in fact, the most knowledgeable and active group that the SZOP project yielded. Children’s Club (CC) consisted of 12 members who were first recommended and elected by the fellow students. CC members, in particular, were extremely well informed about the program ranging from the six grave violations, Codes of Conduct (CoC), the use of suggestion box, to the MRM. They were in fact, at the forefront of all SZOP activities such as the risk mapping, monitoring and reporting various violations, and leading outreach to the broader community.

The significant increase in children’s knowledge and commitment was a foremost intended result of the SZOP project. Various activities targeted children and paid more attention to their safety, education, and their participation. The reinforcement of an existing CC, combined with the advocacy work on child’s rights to all stakeholders, provided safe space for children to voice their opinion and become actively involved.

The Children’s Club builds “children’s self-esteem and confidence, increases their access to information, [and] develops their solidarity and leadership qualities.” According to the SZOP project officer in Goma, when some students were absent from school, CC members took on the leadership and the initiative to investigate the cause, solve the problem, and advise them to return to class. In one case where a student was absent in class due to another classmate who was associated with an armed group, attended school with a weapon, and
threatened fellow students, CC played a mediator role and communicated with the perpetrator that it is a clear violation of Code of Conduct and prevented further conflicts.

CC members also hosted a meeting after a teacher filed complaints about some students attending school without bathing themselves. The teacher noted with satisfaction, “[After the meeting,] children who used to show up at school dirty now try to clean themselves more often.” In addition to their own meetings, they were also invited to PTA meetings to represent other students, stay informed about ongoing school matters, and at times were present to support fellow students – like the case above where a student was frequently late. Most remarkably, the club functioned as child brigades actively leading and participating in the community outreach work that the partner NGO (PNGO) was organizing. CC members in a small school in Masisi 2 recalled walking along the street markets and raising awareness on child protection, children’s rights to education, school safety, etc. These children seemed so proud and confident when they shared the story.

“I think when I participate, when they engage me in any activities and when I say something, I feel I am contributing to the safety of my school.”

-A student from a school in Nyiragongo

Looking Forward with Children’s Club: CC would be by far, one of the most successful outcomes of SZOP activities. Not only boys but also girls were widely engaged and empowered through their participation. What was unfortunate however was that even amongst the children there was a drastic difference in terms of the level of knowledge and commitment depending on their status as CC vs. non-CC member. Despite the school-wide advocacy work and cultural activities (i.e. school plays, singing songs, games, etc.) led by CCs, during the FGD with students, it was evident that non-CC members were not well aware and informed about the core concepts of SZOP. Moving forward, creative ideas to involve more children and to disseminate information on child protection and education could be probed. For instance, a student advisory committee would be one idea to maintain the electoral system yet allow for other students to participate in CC meetings/trainings. It could also be operated in a rotation to offer more opportunities.

In addition, there could be a stronger mandate on the gender ratio not only amongst the CC members but also between their supervisors; only one school out of the five sample schools kept the ratio which is one male and one female teacher. It is extremely beneficial for female students to have female leadership in the school community and it goes same for the teachers themselves. Playing a leadership role is important for their capacity building and empowerment yet was a rare case in the Congolese communities.

Codes of Conduct (CoC) and Teacher Training: Codes of Conduct (CoC) was another intervention that was developed and reinforced based on the existing structure. The new CoC utilized the template from the Education Cluster, incorporated the guidelines, and included references to protecting education from attacks. Prior to the project, only 3 of the targeted schools had CoCs in place and after the validation from MOE in February 2017, almost all schools had signatures from multiple stakeholders and it was posted publicly in the classrooms and in the head teacher’s office. The development of CoCs took on a participatory approach inviting teachers, students, parents, and community members and raised awareness on the guidelines and protection of education, which was newly incorporated in the CoCs. In case of violation, school communities are required to report through various channels offered in the SZOP project.

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88 Taken from NMFA Final Report, 2016: Implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict through Schools as Zones of Peace.
Corporal punishment by parents and teachers was the most common violation of CoCs in the Congolese communities. As noted earlier, SZOP approaches threats from multiple angles looking at external as well as internal factors that could lead to risks in and around the school. According to the data shared by the MEAL officer in the SC Goma office, during the year 2016, almost a quarter of complaints (112 out of 466) collected via suggestion box fell under this category. As a response, SC prepared trainings for teachers regarding alternative methods to corporal punishment. During a separate FGD with children and teachers, a noticeable decrease in corporal punishment was frequently noted as one of the greatest benefits of the SZOP project. This decrease however mostly derived from the widely-communicated knowledge that corporal punishment is a clear violation of CoC. One student confidently commented that "I reported on the corporal punishment in class and ever since, no student has experienced the incident.” On the flipside, what was relatively less communicated was the classroom rules and the respect for teachers, which resulted them to feel disempowered and "simply reported on.” Teachers therefore called for additional trainings on alternative methods and classroom management, as conflicts continued to rise in the absence of corporal punishment. Other trainings for teachers included a workshop on the guide – a teacher’s guide for protection mainstreaming in education89 - which served as a reference point and a tool to help teachers integrate and incorporate the topic of protection into their everyday teaching. The guide also suggests the types of response teachers should undertake in the event of attacks.

**Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM):** As previously noted, DRC has had an official MRM for more than a decade and "the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO)’s child protection section manages the monitoring, reporting, and verification of grave violations90”. After violations have been reported from the school level, SC DRC shares them with the Education Cluster; it links it up to the MRM verification system and facilitates an appropriate response and higher-level advocacy91.

The role of SC DRC through the SZOP project was to avoid creating a parallel mechanism and instead, shared information and pushed for the existing structure by raising awareness and providing trainings on monitoring and reporting practices. As a result, students, teachers, local authorities, representatives of PTAs and community-based child protection network were all trained on the Guidelines and reporting practices of various violations ranging from the six grave violations, CoCs, to general child protection principles. In addition, head teachers from all 30 schools were given a toll free number to call in any sorts of incidents. After the SZOP project was introduced in November 2015, more than 20 attacks were reported by the target schools through SC DRC.

**Suggestion box:** Suggestion boxes are a reporting or feedback mechanism at the school/project level that feeds into the existing formal ones. For every school that was introduced to SZOP, a suggestion box was located in the center of the school to widely and openly communicate with the school community. Perhaps due to its physical presence, the suggestion box was most frequently brought up when stakeholders were asked about the SZOP activities. Periodically, the MEAL officer visited schools, opened the suggestion box, and read notes together with the head teacher. Questions remain regarding the sustainability of this practice however for the security purposes, the head teacher did not solely have access to the box. Issues that could be tackled at the school level were handled first and others that were more severe and needed further steps were taken to the SC office, as SC is useful for contacting appropriate authorities.

89 Taken from ECHO project proposal: Schools as Zones of Peace: Operationalizing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict
91Taken from NMFA Final Report, 2016: Implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict through Schools as Zones of Peace.
In 2016, SC DRC received a total of 466 complaints from 30 schools that were implementing SZOP in North Kivu. Almost 70% of the feedbacks/complaints constituted material support such as construction and renovation of school buildings, supply of classroom materials such as desks, textbooks, curriculum, etc. Next ranked reports of child abuse (24%), which were a violation of teacher and parents CoCs92. Teachers had mixed feelings towards the box. On the one hand, they thought it was beneficial for creating a safer school environment but they also felt "simply reported on" and unequipped to manage the classroom without the use of corporal punishment. Many teachers also noted that there are multiple cases of misuse such as jobless community members falsely reporting them and threatening their employment.

Looking Forward with MRM: What is worrisome however is that still, there were many incidents of violations that went unreported. It was evident that the new knowledge gained from the SZOP project was at times not translated into practice due to the complex reality that the school community resided in. For example, there was a strong tendency amongst the diverse stakeholders - be it the children, parents, teachers, and head teachers - that did not identify ANSAs as an entity that must be reported on. Some even considered them “the protectors of the community” and therefore acknowledged them as a part of their community93. The same head teacher who welcomed the practicality of SZOP in terms of protecting his school, commented that instead of utilizing the free call, he would opt for carefully talking to the militia to ensure children’s safety. It was clear that instead of preventing their access, he sought for avenues to remain peaceful and harmonious with the armed groups. He noted, “When you have an enemy you need to find a way to live with him.”

The reluctance to report was also found amongst parents and community members. In a private interview with one vice president of PTA, she shared that armed groups are still around and SZOP project cannot solve the problem. She expressed the fear of the rebel groups “getting back” (referring to revenge) after reporting. She said, “We live as a community. I meet them all the time. It is difficult to report if anything happens because they will know and get back.”

Another layer of confusion on ‘whether to report’ was added from the attacks that did not occur from the militias. In two schools out of five visited by the researcher, they experienced attacks from civil society such as protesters and police, which largely came from the political instability prevalent in Congolese society. Early this year when there was a transition of local authorities and the change of tribal kings, a civil society group called for school closures as an indication of support. School authorities decided to stay open for the security of students who might show up. As a result, protesters occupied the school field, interrupted classes by throwing rocks, and attacked classrooms. The teacher who was concerned about children’s safety kept students inside and was later arrested for disobeying police orders. This again reflects the complexity of the context that the SZOP project in DRC targets. Not only the armed conflict, which was largely discussed during the risk mapping activity but also the political instability – which derives from the tension created by state actors - is an additional layer of threat that easily jeopardizes students’ safety in and around the school.

From these challenges we can conclude the following needs: 1) Clear definition and understanding of what constitutes violations and attacks and these should be well communicated and internalized amongst all stakeholders in order to yield meaningful practices. 2) Reiterated importance of multilevel engagement and this...
means sensitizing not only school communities but also stakeholders at the provincial and national levels. Weak buy-in from one particular level deteriorates and minimizes the overall impact.

**Listening Points (LPS):** As part of the psycho-social support, the SZOP project in DRC offered Listening Points (LPS) and located them inside the communities. To ensure that children receive appropriate care when needed, LPS were stationed in 4 different communities in North Kivu where attacks occurred the most but lacked the necessary facilities for immediate response. A trained staff from the PNGO was present in the LP at all times to provide appropriate services.

LP for instance, not only registered reports of attacks and violations (the function of MRM) but also provided response services through coordinated referral mechanism. LP connected victims to the health center, police, institutions for psychosocial support (counselors were also available in LP), and they contacted the justice office when severe violations such as rape were reported. According to an interview with staff at the PNGO, 231 violations were documented through 4 LPS. The PNGO also engaged in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) activities which was later introduced in the project as some armed groups released child soldiers as a result of community sensitization. During the year between 2016 and 2017, with the help of the PNGO, 16 kids left the armed groups and were sent to the transition center. For those above the age 15, SC DRC strongly advocated for the school principals to enroll them in an accelerated education program, which allowed them to finish their secondary education in three years instead of the traditional six.

**Looking Forward with Listening Points:** More and ongoing capacity building for the local PNGOs is an aspect that must be noted as SZOP unfolds. As much as the core messages of SZOP (importance of MRM data, protecting education from attacks, etc.) were new learning and skills for the school communities, the PNGO commented that they were trained only once prior to the roll out and felt the need for refreshers. The strong capacity of local PNGOs is key to success in SZOP project in contexts like DRC where 1) geographically speaking, target communities are vastly spread out and often located far from the SC office; 2) the country is heavily community-driven in that due to its fragile state, communities do not necessarily search for help at higher levels but instead makes decisions and looks for resources within; and moreover, 3) fluid and direct communication with SC is challenging due to the lack of facilities in the target communities. In cases mentioned previously, the local PNGO plays a key mediator role, managing the in-between communication and providing the necessary immediate response and frontline assistance.

The greatest challenge in operating LPS, quoted by the PNGO, was again regarding the complexity of the Congolese community. Now that it has been more than 4-5 years since the war against M23 was declared over, many of the ex-combatants returned to their old villages and some continued as ANSAs but resided closer or within the community. The PNGO is not professionally trained to engage in direct contact with the ANSAs, therefore not permitted to either communicate or provide service to them. Many ANSAs however were wearing two hats, both militias and parents/family members. As a result, staff at the PNGO expressed the difficulty operating in these complex situations, managing the LPS as well as conducting community outreach work. In response to this difficulty, the project officer commented that he has been advising the PNGO to share these complex and sensitive cases with Geneva Call and do not attempt to proceed without their support.

**Engagement with Armed Non-State Actors (ANSAs)**

*Interview with the Project Officer*
It is the role of the partner NGO, Geneva Call (GC), to directly engage with major ANSAs and improve their knowledge of humanitarian norms such as protecting children in armed conflicts. As part of SZOP project, GC initiated conversations with 5 ANSAs regarding their enforcement of the Guidelines and analyzed the factors that often lead to the use and attacks of schools. GC conducted trainings based on the level of knowledge and understanding of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), since some ANSAs were more aware of it than others (SCN ECHO Proposal, 2015). Within the same armed group also, there was a learning discrepancy. Therefore, the new training kit responded to these needs and incorporated the Guidelines. It includes a manual for trainers, presentations to facilitate the training, and pre- and post-tests to evaluate the learning and inform the following sessions. More materials were prepared to support the learning and its dissemination to others such as the booklets, posters, and videos.

Through media campaigns, which mainly used 9 local radio stations, GC also aimed to raise awareness among combatant groups with which the dialogue has not been initiated and to inform local communities about the existence of the Guidelines. The commitment of the community and local authorities is critical in that it leads to the buy-in of the armed groups in the area. This was part of “Fighter not Killer” campaign that began in July 2016, which has educated the local population on IHL especially regarding the protection of education from attack. So far the response from ANSAs has been favorable since many groups identified themselves as protectors of the community. No ANSAs were resistant to the idea since GC approaches from the humanitarian angle rather than the violations of IHL. The message was that the community benefits from children’s education and it was quite convincing for ANSAs since some were also the providers of education. One ANSA officer commented that now with the enlightenment of protecting children and education, they build schools in the valley rather than on the hills to prevent them from becoming easy targets.

Looking Forward with Engagement with ANSAs: Since the inception of the SZOP project some armed groups have accepted and adopted the Guidelines by including them in their rules and policies. Amongst the 5 groups that GC initiated dialogue with, one group - the Alliance des Patriotes pour un Congo Libre et Souverain (APCLS) – has signed the Deed of Commitment. Depending on the source, it has been noted that there are roughly 30 armed groups in North and South Kivu and up to 70 of them in eastern DRC. It is a small achievement yet small victories counts considering the new learning it generates. A staff member from the GC Goma office commented that with lessons learned from the first agreement, they feel more equipped when approaching the new ANSAs. Now they know what works and what to expect and negotiate when opening up a new channel with ANSAs.

Challenges remain and thus require long term and continued support. First, there are still a large number of major ANSAs active in the eastern Congo. Moreover, there is always an issue of security, which makes it difficult for GC to provide continued support to the ANSAs that they are already in contact with. A follow up sensitization is key to the armed groups as well as the community members in the controlled area. However

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99Taken from NMFA Final Report, 2016: Implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict through Schools as Zones of Peace
97Ibid
96Interview with a staff from GC Goma Office
95Taken from NMFA Final Report, 2016: Implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict through Schools as Zones of Peace
93Taken from ECHO project proposal: Schools as Zones of Peace: Operationalizing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict
physically reaching them has been a challenge since the majority of ANSAs are not sensitized and do not agree with GC activities causing access to be limited. In addition, the work that GC does is greatly dependent on the dynamics of the conflict, which tend to be extremely volatile. Coupled with that, is the nature of their work, which requires a long-term commitment to change mindsets and behaviors of ANSAs.

**SZOP at the Provincial/National Level**

Prior sections have elaborated on the work that has occurred at the grassroots level—this has been the most robust level for project activities but national stakeholders have also been engaged. At the national level, SC DRC brought together key stakeholders from the MOE, education cluster, child protection sub cluster and other government counterparts to provide trainings on the guidelines and contextualization process in DRC. Some of the advocacy work included raising awareness on child protection especially in relation to children’s access to education and emphasizing participatory approaches and local ownership. SC also assisted in establishing the joint technical working group (Groupe de Travail Technique Conjoint, GTTC) which had MOE, Ministry of Defense (MOD), Ministry of Interior and Security (MIS), MONUSCO and other key actors on board to ensure their active participation.

Another key effort placed towards contextualizing SZOP project in DRC was to advocate for the endorsement of Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), which was carried out in July 2016. To contribute towards this achievement, a legal review of current legislation looking for ways in which the SSD could be best implemented in the context of DRC was carried out. According to the external consultant (conducting the legal review) whose expertise was in law, it was found that DRC’s constitution sheds light on children’s rights to education but lacks the specific aspect of protecting education, especially protecting schools from attacks. The following September, the consultant presented this finding at a roundtable discussion held for national stakeholders and there, the practical implementation of the Guidelines was subsequently discussed. The MOE for example noted that they would adopt the guidelines by incorporating it within their existing peace education work and add in the gaps of school safety and child protection. The MOD also agreed to infuse the Guidelines into their military training manual,”Buku ya Alkari”

In June 2017, a second round table discussion at the national level took place. The main take away was as follows: to reaffirm the commitment of the MIS to incorporate the Guidelines (they are in charge of Congolese National Police, PNC); to increase the participation of the education cluster and centrally manage its information in GTTC; and lastly, to keep all the actors in GTTC informed about the protection of schools from military use by sharing the quarterly report.

What is unique to DRC is an additional layer of contextualization, which took place at the provincial level. This is largely due to the vast size of DRC combined with frequent outbreaks located far away from the capital. In October 2016, SC hosted a roundtable discussion in Goma inviting MONUSCO, UNICEF, and the MOE to discuss practical implementation. The provincial MOE in particular has been a crucial partner collaborating in all stages of SZOP project; from the selection of its target schools, approving trainings and manuals, to conducting joint visits to the target schools. They also agreed to incorporate the Guidelines into their policies and so far various SZOP activities such as risk mapping, risk reduction plans, CoCs have been validated in the province.

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103 Interview with a project officer in SC Goma office
104 Interview with a project officer in SC Goma office
105 Taken from NMFA Final Report, 2016: Implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict through Schools as Zones of Peace
Protection and education clusters have also been actively involved at the provincial level. The education cluster in North Kivu for instance took the lead in raising awareness and disseminating the Guidelines and they are responsible for managing the database on attacks and mapping key issues related to armed groups and their threats on education. Its aim was to nurture active MRM reporting in the area.

As was the case in oPt, this multi-level engagement was also key to success of the SZOP project in DRC. This is largely because successfully contextualizing the project at higher levels trickles down to grassroots implementation. For instance, as much as ANSAs were identified as threats, the harassment of the national defense forces (FARDC under MOD) and attacks by the police (PNC under MIS) and protesters were noted as potential harm to children's safety in schools. In a FGD with teachers, they were alluding to the context in DRC where anybody with a weapon was considered a potential threat. They added, “At night, they [= PNC and FARDC] have no pity.” This indicates that without the commitment in the national level - in this anecdote, MOD and MIS taking the leadership in safeguarding schools – the impact of active reporting and sensitization in the school level will remain minimal.

Presently however, DRC has not been able to fully achieve successful and fluid engagement at all levels as was evident in oPt. School communities were not aware of the activities taking place at higher levels and they were reluctant to place faith in political leadership. Unless fluid communication and coordination across levels takes place and progress is felt by all stakeholders, the learning and practice introduced by SZOP will not likely be sustained. It is still too early to determine the outcomes of multilevel coordination and engagement in DRC. The project is still young, only half a length compared to the three year implementation in oPt and the vast territory of DRC calls for a sufficient time to establish a fluid communication and coordination across levels. However, the continued effort must be ensured to aim for the synergy effect expected when strong commitments at all levels reinforce one another.

Discussion

The previous sections have provided a detailed description of SZOP activities and were organized in a way that reflects the bottom-up/multilevel engagement model of the SZOP project. The descriptions of each activity tapped into what went well, what remains as a challenge, and the implications that could be drawn from these experiences. The following section maintains the same structure but approaches the project as a whole examining the successes, challenges, and implications of the SZOP project in DRC.

Positive Practices in DRC

One of the strengths of the SZOP project in DRC was that SC made the most of what was already in place and channelled the resources to what was either lacking or missing. That is, it refused to create a parallel mechanism but strived instead to revive and reinforce existing structures. For example, the official MRM was introduced in DRC more than a decade ago but there were culturally inhibitive issues of reporting. After identifying this gap, SC reached out to the school community – which had CC/PTA/community-based child protection network, etc. in place - and sensitized and trained them with necessary skills to monitor and report violations and attacks. Instead of using resources to establish a new School Disaster Management Committee, SC provided measures that strengthened the capacity of existing organizations at the schools. It also reckoned that the school community lacked resources and facilities for reporting and making immediate referrals, therefore installed multiple channels such as toll free calls, suggestion boxes, and Listening Points to facilitate the practice.

The active participation of children in the SZOP project was also a key to success in DRC. The project acknowledged
children as protagonists of school safety and therefore heavily invested in their capacity building and empowerment. The members of the CC in particular were trained exclusively on the core messages of the project and functioned as child brigades. In fact, children were the most visible and active stakeholders disseminating the knowledge and linking the activities in and out of school. In school, they sensitized their fellow students and out of school, they led the community outreach such as presenting plays on child protection and education. They also hosted their own meetings corresponding to the conflicts in the classroom and were present at the PTA meetings to represent other students and stay informed on other school matters. Having children as protagonists of SZOP project was extremely successful in DRC and measures to prevent unintended consequences such as putting them at risk were in place and carefully thought out. For instance, without the representation or the supervision of teachers, identified parents, or the PNGO staffs, children were not allowed to conduct any activities outside of school.

**Ongoing Challenges**

What must be noted as the biggest challenge in the context of DRC is that the culture of the Congolese community is not conducive to reporting. Some participants did not see reporting as an ideal solution to violations and others were confused about definitions of attacks. In some cases, participants thought the violations committed by the national police or the national defence forces did not qualify as attacks and ended up not reporting. This was the case at least in two schools out of five that the researcher visited and implied for many more attacks that could have been unreported. This finding was echoed in a study that examined the monitoring and reporting practices of North Kivu. The research team looked into the attacks that took place between late 2013 and mid 2015, selected 23 reports of attacks for further verification, and resulted in identifying an additional 29 attacks that were left unreported. This finding implies that more attacks go unreported than those that are documented. What is hopeful however is that amongst the reported attacks, 70% came from the educational institutions that included head teachers, teachers, school administrators, and MOE. This suggests the potential for SZOP to continue advocating for child protection and education and generate more active participation.

Another rationale that calls for more advocacy work from the SZOP project is the discrepancy of knowledge and commitment found across stakeholder groups. Parents and community members for example were the group that was least engaged in the SZOP activities; and they remained doubtful about the outcomes of the project and therefore least knowledgeable about its core messages. Their lack of confidence largely came from the current situation where ANSAs/ex-combatants were cohabitants of the community. This informs the importance of raising awareness of the duty-bearers as well as the need for more communication with the community members about the comprehensive work that SZOP does including the work by Geneva Call. In addition, key participants of the SZOP activities must be reminded about their role as representatives of their stakeholder group so that they engage in active dissemination of knowledge and encourage more participation from the rest of the community.

The lack of commitment at the political level could also be identified as an ongoing challenge in DRC. The Code of Conduct, which is one of the key activities in the SZOP project was held in the MOE office for months before its final validation in February. According to the interview with the project officer in SC Goma office, engaging the political level is challenging because they are extremely transient due to the unstable political landscape and some politicians were relatives of ANSAs thus getting them involved was difficult. The weak engagement alone level yields weak coordination across all levels. Therefore in DRC, the activities that targeted different levels tended to be seen in isolation and the linkage across the levels became either loose or unclear. This reiterates the importance of local ownership as well as the deeper sensitization in the leadership. Creative ways to encourage the buy-in at the national/provincial level need to be further explored.

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Recommendations and Opportunities for Deepened Impact

**Improving Reporting at the School Level:** Considering the numerous violations that went undocumented in DRC, measures must be taken to promote active reporting. Foremost, continuous efforts to raise awareness for protecting education must be coupled with clear communication of violations and definitions of what constitutes an attack. This is to reduce and avoid incidences where violations are not reported due to misunderstanding and confusion. For example in the study mentioned above, the research team used the broader term “disruption of education by armed groups” instead of “attacks on school” because the literal meaning of the latter could potentially limit the concept. In addition, they clearly listed examples of what the term entailed to ensure a standard definition and gain deeper understanding. Providing these examples perhaps could also be useful in the SZOP project since it leaves little room for compromise and interpretation. Especially in the cases such as the school in Nyiragongo where militias were often at the school to fetch water but not to “attack” schools, those broader terms accompanied by clear examples could have guided to more active reporting by the school staff.

**Ongoing Advocacy Work for Deeper Engagement of the Parents and Community Members and Heavier Emphasis on the Information Flow:** Introduced in November 2015, the SZOP project is still young and its messages are new to most of the local community members which call for a long-term, consistent advocacy work to bring about meaningful changes in the school community. Keeping in mind the nature of the Congolese society that is extremely volatile and heavily community driven, the efforts elaborated earlier, such as targeting the local leaders for a stronger buy-in and approaching the community with conflict sensitive manners, must be ensured and maintained. It is crucial to have the local leaders on board with SZOP activities and encourage them to be strong advocates of its core values since not only do they have more influence over ANSA practices but also the politics that govern within the community allow the messages to be perceived less reluctantly and to flow more fluidly. In addition to this step, importance of the diffusion of information must be reiterated and emphasized throughout the SZOP activities to ensure more effective information flow.

**Gender Sensitive Programming:** The current SZOP project needs to improve gender sensitive programming. Moving forward, more work needs to be done directly engaging female community members and encouraging their participation. Through those programs, females including students, teachers, and community members, will be able to enjoy a safe space and be empowered to voice their concerns and opinions. According to the PNGO, females in the community are often sexually harassed and raped by the rebel groups and fellow community members but due to the cultural taboo they are inhibited and deterred from reporting. The PPGO shared that they once held a FGD targeting only females and sensitized them on protecting education from attacks and reporting sexual violations however noted the limitation and called for more opportunities and resources.

**Infrastructure & Resource Support:** One suggestion that was strongly urged by the local staff in the SC Goma office was more allocation of budgets for infrastructural support. The material support was not only the vast majority of complaints filed from the school communities but also was necessary since almost all schools that received SZOP intervention were damaged from attacks. Facility-wise, schools were not in good condition to promote school safety let alone to hold sessions for students to learn. Budget for infrastructural support is also needed as part of the response mechanism after attacks are

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108 Ibid.
reported and verified. According to the MEAL officer in the SC Goma office, so far the only assistance that they have been able to provide was sending counsellors from Listening Points to the damaged school to provide psychosocial support.

Currently, most infrastructural and material support is channelled through the Education in Emergencies (EiE\textsuperscript{109}) program that 20 out of the 30 SZOP schools receive. The combination of the two programs has generated positive effects. The material support from the EiE program for example worked as a way to prevent and mitigate the risks in the school field. In one school where accidents in the lake and the main road were identified as threats, the recreational materials, which were part of EiE programming, distracted students and deterred them from accessing the lake. Teachers noted that students are now busy playing soccer and not tempted to leave the school grounds during recess. With these unintended benefits in mind, the SZOP project should highly consider including the bare minimum of material support for students’ safety in school.

\textsuperscript{109}Funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since 2013, SC has implemented EiE program in North Kivu focusing on increasing access to quality education for children and improving the capacity of the Education Cluster at the provincial level to prepare for and respond to education needs in the area (SCN ECHO Proposal, 2015).
Annex 2 - Inception Report

The inception report is available as a separate document. Please request.
Annex 3 – Terms of Reference

ToR for the Evaluation of Schools as Zones of Peace

Background: Military Use of and Attacks on Schools

59 million children are out of school worldwide, and about half of these live in countries with armed conflict. Between 2009-2013, there were attacks on schools in 70 countries. Students and teachers can be killed, and their school buildings damaged by attacks. In addition, armies and armed groups occupy school buildings. Weapons can be left on school premises, and the children also face looting of schools and education material. These unnerving barriers to education disrupt their schooling, and prevent these children from reaching their true potential. To address this problem, 37 states endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration in Oslo, on May 29th 2015. It shows their political commitment to protect education from attack. To date, there are 57 signatories to the declaration. By endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, the states commit to implement the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. However, although states sign the Safe Schools Declaration, there is no global guidance or follow-up mechanism to ensure implementation.

Save the Children’s Response: Schools as Zones of Peace

Therefore, Save the Children is implementing a project that aims to link the global work done on protecting education from attack to the operationalization at school level in affected countries. Schools as Zones of Peace is a Save the Children led project that aims to secure children’s safety at school, and avoid that education is disrupted because of armed conflict. The project builds on the Schools as Zones of Peace model that was successful in ensuring children’s access to education in Nepal during the civil war, and builds on activities such as Codes of Conducts, while linking it to the Safe Schools Declaration. In the project, we work with children, school management and local communities to map out risks and look at how to reduce these risks, reporting and referral mechanisms and the above-mentioned Code of Conducts, and work to influence local, national and global policies. Locally, the project aims to ensure safe learning environments in conflict and post-conflict situations, raise awareness among communities, school management and children, and build local and national level engagement to protect education. This includes using participatory tools and methods to engage children. This is a way to implement the Safe Schools Declaration through a bottom-up approach by engaging local schools and communities. Where the context allows, we work through partners to engage armed non state actors among others to keep schools safe and not disrupt education. Globally, we aim to link experiences from these countries to the global advocacy and policy work. The project is funded by ECHO and the Norwegian MFA, and runs from 1 July 2015-30 June 2017. The budget is currently around 950,000 EUR.

Implementing Countries

The Schools as Zones of Peace project is currently being implemented in the below countries.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), implementation from November 2015-June 2017
occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), implementation from July 2014-June 2017
Niger, implementation from December 2016-December 2017
South Sudan, implementation from August 2016-July 2017

The implementation in these countries draws on experiences from Nepal, and other countries who have implemented contextualised versions such as Afghanistan, Cote d’Ivoire and Liberia.

Key Activities in SZOP

The activities are carried out on three levels: school, community and national level. The below activities are the key components of the project, but these also depend on the context of the implementing country. The activities are contextualised, and not all are done in each country (please see brackets per activity)

Vulnerability Baseline Assessment (all)
Child Resilience Methodology (only oPt)
Children’s clubs (DRC/Niger), Peace clubs (South Sudan),
Awareness Raising on Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines (all)
Risk and Resource Mapping (all)
School Disaster Management Committees/Plans (oPt/Niger), Risk Reduction Plans (DRC, South Sudan)
Referral Networks/ Mechanisms (all)
Monitoring/Reporting of Attacks on Education (linked to MRM where relevant) (oPt, DRC)
Code of Conduct (reinforcing existing or developing new) (all)
Contextualising the Safe Schools Declaration (through legal review, advocating for endorsement etc) (all)

Throughout these project activities, there is a focus on child participation (especially in risk and resource mappings and development of the Code of Conduct) and building constituencies for protecting education from attack. Experiences from these as well as other countries will be used to create a toolkit that will be shared with other organisations and Save the Children (SCI) country offices. It forms part of a larger programme development effort to ensure safe schools for all children affected by disaster and conflict.

Purpose of the Evaluation

In order to learn from the current implementation there is a need to evaluate the project implementation. The main purpose of the evaluation is to assess and document results of the SZOP project so far, including unintended effects of the project. The evaluation will also provide lessons learned and recommendations for future work, including recommendations for dissemination/scaling up the project with other organisations and global partners.

The main audience for the report is Save the Children, partners and local/national stakeholders.

Scope and key questions

The evaluation will cover the project period from 1 July 2015 – 30 June 2017. The assignment will include field work in DRC and oPt in addition to desk study of all four countries in addition to the global advocacy component. Since implementation just started in Niger and South Sudan we don't expect much results from these two countries.

The main objectives of the evaluation are:

1. assess and document results of the SZOP project, including any positive or negative unintended effects of the interventions
2. make recommendations to Save the Children regarding the design and implementation of SZOP for future work

The following key questions will guide the evaluation:

Relevance
a. Were interventions designed, planned and implemented to meet the needs and interests of the affected population?
b. To what extent have the interventions been contextualized in each of the implementing countries according to the specific conflict context, relevant national policies and strategies on protecting education from attacks?

Effectiveness
a. What have been the intended results of the SZOP at country level so far measured against the objectives of the project?
b. What factors may explain achievement and non-achievement of results?
c. Have interventions had any likely unintended consequences, positive or negative?
d. To what extent have experiences from the national implementation been feeding into the global work?
e. What has been the role of child participation in achieving the results?

Sustainability
a. Are interventions designed and implemented in a manner that supports longer term needs in the work on protecting education from attacks?
b. What role do existing education and child protection coordination mechanisms (including government ministries and departments) play in facilitating activities?

Methodology

The evaluation will involve document review and interviews, and will build on a range of existing information, such as project documents and progress reports. Information should be triangulated and validated. Any limitations to the data as well as to the methods and analysis should be stated clearly. As far as possible, the evaluation should use gender disaggregated data.
Interviews should include key informants, and focus group discussions with children, parents and teachers at affected schools. Validation and feedback workshops shall be held in the country before departure, involving key partners and stakeholders.

The reviewer has to take into account the guiding principles mentioned in the Save the Children International (SCI) Evaluation Handbook. Since the field work would entail consulting directly with children, the reviewer needs to work in accordance with Save the Children's Child Safeguarding Policy and Child Participation Principles and the Save the Children Code of Conduct.

**Deliverables**

- **Inception report** not exceeding 20 pages (excluding annexes)
- **Draft report** (including case study reports from DRC and oPt and an overview of tools used in activities at country level)
- **Presentation of the draft findings and conclusions with stakeholders in the two case countries**
- **Final report** not exceeding 40 pages, excluding executive summary and annexes
- **Presentation of the final report** for SCN in Oslo

**Organisation**

The evaluation will be managed by a steering group in SCN. The steering group will be in regular contact with the team leader for the assignment and give input to and approve the inception, draft and final report.

The team leader of the evaluation will be responsible for identifying potential assistants to support him/her if necessary. The team leader will be responsible for developing a sound methodology, planning and conducting a consultative evaluation and managing the data collection, as well as write the report and present the findings and recommendations.

**Timeline**

The evaluation is estimated to 30 working days, including preparation, field work in DRC and oPt, data analysis and report writing. We expect the field work to be approximately 7 days in each of the two countries. A final timeline will be determined jointly by the steering group and the team leader.

**Budget/resources**

Save the Children Norway will fund the evaluation by covering consultancy fees and travel related costs spent during the evaluation process.

**Contact information:**

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Veslemøy Ask, Senior Advisor Evaluations and Knowledge Management (*veslemoy.ask@reddbarna.no*)

## Annex 4 - Persons Interviewed

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Contact Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Form of Input</th>
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<tr>
<td>Save the Children Norway</td>
<td>Ingunn Eidhammer</td>
<td>Senior Safe Schools Coordinator</td>
<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Save the Children Norway</td>
<td>Nora Ingdal</td>
<td>Education Director</td>
<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Save the Children Norway</td>
<td>Gry Ballestad</td>
<td>Humanitarian Director</td>
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<td>Save the Children Norway</td>
<td>Kristin Ingebrigtsen</td>
<td>Protection Advisor for SZOP</td>
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<td>Save the Children Norway</td>
<td>Linnea Crafoord</td>
<td>Award Manager</td>
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<td>Save the Children Norway</td>
<td>Linda Bukåsen</td>
<td>Area director for the Middle East and Europe</td>
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<td>Save the Children Norway</td>
<td>Ketil Vaas</td>
<td>Senior Education Advisor for South Sudan</td>
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<td>Save the Children UK</td>
<td>Veronique Aubert</td>
<td>Senior Conflict &amp; Humanitarian Research and Policy Adviser</td>
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<td>European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO)</td>
<td>Judit Barna</td>
<td>Policy Officer, Education in Emergencies</td>
<td>Interview</td>
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<td>European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO)</td>
<td>Anne Sophie Laenholm</td>
<td>Global Thematic Coordinator - Protection</td>
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<td>Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)</td>
<td>Gisela Schmidt-Martín</td>
<td>Coordinator, Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict</td>
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<td>Save the Children Niger</td>
<td>Alahdji Amadou</td>
<td>Education Manager</td>
<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Save the Children Niger</td>
<td>Abdou Bako</td>
<td>National Education in Emergencies Officer in the Education Program</td>
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<td>Save the Children DRC</td>
<td>Powel Tchatat</td>
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<td>Save the Children DRC</td>
<td>Gray Bahati</td>
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<td>Save the Children DRC</td>
<td>Dëogratias Bahimba</td>
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<td>Save the Children DRC</td>
<td>Natalie Muhongya</td>
<td>MEAL Officer Education</td>
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<td>Ministry of Education in DRC (Provincial Office in Goma)</td>
<td>Axcel Mutia</td>
<td>Advisor to Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>Geneva Call</td>
<td>Tony Kiumbe</td>
<td>Country Program Coordinator</td>
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<td>Uhuru Pamoja (PNGO in DRC)</td>
<td>Fiston Kambale</td>
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<td>Uhuru Pamoja (PNGO in DRC)</td>
<td>David Musafiri</td>
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<td>Save the Children oPt</td>
<td>Abeer Abu Sneineh</td>
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<td>Lubna Iskandar</td>
<td>Child rights governance Manager</td>
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<td>Komal Adris</td>
<td>Advocacy and communications manager</td>
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<td>Save the Children oPt</td>
<td>Mohammad Daoud</td>
<td>Senior MEAL Officer</td>
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<td>Save the Children oPt</td>
<td>Mohammed Sami</td>
<td>Director, Field Follow-Up Unit, MEHE</td>
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<td>Save the Children oPt</td>
<td>Kahraman Arfeh</td>
<td>Coordinator, Field Follow-Up Unit, MEHE</td>
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Report