RETHINK CHILD SOLDIERS

A NEW APPROACH TO THE REINTEGRATION OF ALL CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED FORCES AND GROUPS

WAR child

This report aims to bring global attention to the challenges related to the reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups, and promote better policy, practice and funding in the future.

FOREWORD

More than 20 years after the establishment of my office, children are still recruited into armed forces and groups in almost every armed conflict in the world. The UN estimates that tens of thousands of children are associated with armed forces and groups – and we know that their experiences in both state armed forces and non-state armed groups are filled with violence, abuse and exploitation. These children are some of the most vulnerable affected by conflict and yet we find ourselves still having to make the same argument that they need greater support.

That's why I welcome this timely report, Rethink Child Soldiers, from War Child. It highlights challenges with the current provision of reintegration and makes concrete recommendations for change. These speak to what my office has known for a long time – there has to be greater political prioritisation given to children's reintegration. We need to see greater levels of funding and better decision-making to ensure the funding that is available is spent on quality programmes that work with communities and children to drive change. It is only through comprehensive reintegration that we can prevent the recruitment of children and support peace-building in the long-term. In these times of increasing conflict globally, it is important to restate that, irrespective of the nature of the armed force or group, reintegration is essential to ensure a child's individual healing, community acceptance and peace-building in the long-term.

The international community must do more for these children and I hope that the recommendations from this report are heard by global and national policy-makers, donors and practitioners so that together, we can achieve the systemic change needed to reintegrate children and build peace.

Virginia Gamba, UN Special Representative to the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Around the world, children are recruited and used in conflict by armed forces and groups in direct combat and support roles. This violates international law and yet reports from children, NGOs and UN agencies suggest that recruitment is increasing. In armed forces and groups children are directly exposed to violence – as perpetrators, victims and witnesses – experiencing the physical and psychological effects of violence long after they have left. Many children are sexually abused, beaten, killed or permanently injured. On leaving armed groups, children may face huge levels of stigma and discrimination. Children are often rejected by their families and communities, denied access to services, and even detained by authorities as a result of their association with armed groups.

The severity, complexity and varied nature of each child's experience means that children need individualised and tailored support to reintegrate back into society, and it should ideally take place in the context of an ongoing peace process. In contexts where there is still active conflict, extreme poverty and lack of state infrastructure, children's families and communities also need support to enable children to reintegrate. Best practice reintegration programmes and initiatives are comprehensive in this regard, and as such should be long-term.

Yet the current provision of reintegration support is far from ideal. This report identifies key barriers to reintegration programming that War Child has experienced and witnessed:

1. Insufficient funding to deliver comprehensive programming

2. Limited quality programming with too great a focus on short-term interventions

3. A dearth of community-led initiatives and programming directed at addressing the root causes of children's recruitment and preventing future recruitment

4. Poor institutional capacity hindering the availability of reintegration support

5. Exclusion of children as active citizens and from participating in change

6. Legal and political classifications that deny children access to reintegration support

War Child wants change. We want to see policy-makers, donors and practitioners dismantle these barriers and ensure sustainable reintegration for children that prevents them from being re-recruited and that contributes to re-building social cohesion in the long-term.

All children should have access to quality, context-specific and individualised reintegration support, irrespective of the armed force or group that they have been associated with. To make this is a reality, War Child recommends that:

1. CHILDREN AND COMMUNITIES PARTICIPATE IN PROGRAMME DESIGN AND POLICY RESPONSE

Governments, donors and UN agencies should:

- Include children in peace-building dialogues and processes at local, national and regional levels

UN agencies and I/NGOs should:

- Embed participation as a mechanism of reintegration programming and enable children's meaningful contribution to programme design, implementation and evaluation
- Share power with children and communities (women's groups, religious leaders, teachers, parent-teacher associations, civil society organisations) in designing, implementing and evaluating programmes

2. REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMING BUILDS ON EXISTING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY

UN agencies and I/NGOs should:

- Build on the knowledge and expertise of local NGOs and civil society organisations to deliver reintegration programming, because local actors are best placed to understand the children's and communities' needs and to respond to them appropriately within existing support structures
- Ensure that reintegration programmes do not focus solely on reducing numbers of children in armed forces and groups without also increasing the length and quality of interventions available to children and their peers, families and communities
- Include other vulnerable children in interventions to reduce stigma and prevent further recruitment

- Limit the placement of children in transit or detention centres that institutionalise children and slow down their reconnection with family and community, by increasing the provision of family-based and community-based care
- Support families to accept children back by alleviating stressors in family life, such as enabling access to livelihoods opportunities, and reducing food insecurity. Parents should be supported with resilience-based parenting techniques and psychosocial support so they can form stronger attachments with their children

3. THE EVIDENCE-BASE FOR QUALITY REINTEGRATION SUPPORT IS IMPROVED

Governments and donors should:

- Use research, including locally-produced research, to inform policy responses to ensure policy is inclusive, flexible and relevant to the reintegration needs of all children

UN agencies and I/NGOs should:

- Embed participatory research at every stage of the programme cycle – conducting rigorous context analyses to continuously improve the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes
- Invest in longitudinal studies from varied contexts and academic disciplines to increase knowledge of the long-term impacts of reintegration programming to develop sustainable approaches
- Ensure research includes the most marginalised and excluded children, taking account of gender, age, disability and other minority status

4. INVEST IN INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY PARTICULARLY AT STATE LEVEL

Governments and donors should:

- Increase the allocation of resources to national governments for child protection, taking into account the importance of local staff being present for children and strengthening informal support mechanisms in the absence of sufficient state infrastructure
- Invest in skills-building for the social work forces of national governments and local organisations to ensure social workers can have a long-term relationship with individual children and families based on trust, empathy and support

- Invest in multi-sectoral child protection systems at formal and informal levels so children in need of reintegration support are identified and adequately supported with services adapted to their specific needs (with adaptations made for age, maturity, gender, disability)

- Strengthen state institutions around truth, reconciliation and justice, providing them with resources to prioritise children's reintegration

5. RESOURCES FOR REINTEGRATION ARE SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED

Governments and donors should:

- Redress the imbalances in reintegration provision, particularly the lack of funding and access to services for children's reintegration in conflicts characterised by violent extremism

- Reverse the decline in reintegration funding, through a financial uplift to support multi-year, predictable, sustained and flexible funding for children's reintegration

- Create funding mechanisms and adapt funding requirements and administrative procedures to enable a smoother and quicker flow of money between donors and grantees and avoid gaps in support for children

- Make funding data publicly available and co-ordinate reporting to enable consistent analysis of reporting across all donors (government, multilateral and private) and recipient countries

Governments, donors, UN agencies and I/NGOs should:

- Adopt a long-term view of funding for reintegration programming that supports the children's, families' and communities' resilience and social cohesion through child protection, education, psychosocial support and livelihoods initiatives for up to five years

- Global funds should be governed by a diverse group of reintegration actors (civil society organisations, NGOs, UN, donor and government), with equal decision-making powers to ensure more effective and efficient use of resources and accountability mechanisms established to monitor the disbursement of funds

- Promote consortium approaches to funding and implementing reintegration programming across government, donor, UN, NGO and local civil society, bringing together multiple actors with a range of skills to make reintegration more effective

2. CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED FORCES AND GROUPS - CURRENT KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

> " *Many children enlist in armed groups I assure you because of the suffering, they do not have someone to support them in relation to their problems.* "
>
> **Boy, 14, formerly associated with an armed group, Democratic Republic of Congo[1]**

> " *When a child leaves the [armed group s/he] cannot go home for fear that the head of [the armed group] does harm to his family, especially if the family did not give a goat as protection and the police can put in prison the whole family.* "
>
> **Boy, 15, Democratic Republic of Congo**

2.1 WHO ARE CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED FORCES AND GROUPS?

A child associated with an armed force or group refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.[2]

Children associated with armed forces and groups face multiple rights violations, both during and after their association. Children are directly exposed to violence – as perpetrators, victims and witnesses – experiencing physical and psychological effects of violence long after they have left the armed force or group. Many children are sexually abused, beaten, killed and permanently injured. On leaving armed groups, children and their families face stigma and discrimination. Children may be rejected by their families and communities, denied access to services and even detained for long periods by security forces.

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1 All quotes in this report from the Democratic Republic of Congo are from the research conducted for War Child UK's study: *Tug of War: Children in Armed Groups in DRC, A study on the push and pull factors influencing children to join armed groups 'voluntarily' in North and South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo (2018)*
2 The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, 2.1

It is not known how many children are associated with armed forces and groups globally. Numbers are difficult to quantify given the fluid nature of children's association, limited access to areas under armed control and the reluctance of children, families and communities to openly discuss association. Global estimates have ranged from the tens of thousands to 300,000 and while country estimates do exist, but they are estimates only and cannot be relied upon for accuracy.[3]

Children's association with armed forces and groups is diverse – some are fighters, some are used as spies or informers, some are cooks or work for the armed group in mines or transporting weapons or drugs. Children may take on multiple roles during their time in an armed force or group. Their experiences cannot be thought of as static: they change over time and differ on account of their age, gender, the dynamics of the conflict and the immediate and long-term strategy of the armed force or group.

The reasons why children join armed groups are complex. These range from personal needs-based decisions (food, protection) to social (armed communities, identity, revenge, belonging) and structural (poverty, grievances against the state, corruption). Some children are forced to join after being abducted, their families threatened with death if the child flees. In other cases, families send their children into armed groups as a form of protection and some will decide to join themselves.[4]

Recruitment takes many different forms and is affected by context. In Colombia, children can be asked to run errands for a neighbour or family friend, without even knowing they are in an armed group. They may unwittingly transport drugs or weapons. Some children begin by working in mines or coca plantations controlled by armed groups. Over time their activity in the armed group may increase to reflect more stereotypical images we have of children in armed groups as fighters.

> " *[The armed group] killed my father in front of my eyes and I wanted to kill all of them. So I joined [the opposing armed group].* "
>
> **Boy, 17, formerly associated with an armed group, Central African Republic**[5]

As with children's joining, their experiences of leaving armed groups are equally varied. Some children go through the formal Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process, and some move fluidly between home and the armed group, particularly when entire communities are armed.[6] In northern Central African Republic, the annual migration of cattle herders in the summer usually sparks outbreaks of violence which leads to an increase in children's association with armed groups. In Colombia, once you have joined an armed group you are considered to have joined for life or for a set period. Anyone who tries to leave may be killed.

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3 300,000 child soldiers in front line , The Independent, Rupert Cornwell 11 January 1999
   https://www.independent.co.uk/news/300000-child-soldiers-in-front-line-1046382.html
4 War Child UK, *Tug of War*
5 All quotes in this report from Central African Republic are taken from research conducted for War Child UK's study: *Reintegration of children associated with armed groups and forces: An analytical study of the experience of War Child UK in CAR (2018)*
6 War Child UK, *Tug of War*

Push and pull factors in and out of armed groups are also not static but change as the dynamics of conflict change. There are some structural factors in most settings that underpin push and pull factors: poverty, lack of job opportunities, limited education and very little government presence in areas most affected by armed groups.

2.2 PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDREN IN ARMED FORCES AND GROUPS

Historically, the humanitarian sector focused on forcible recruitment of children – as witnessed in the forms of recruitment in the 1980s and 1990s in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Uganda. Armed groups abducted children from homes and schools, frequently forcing them to commit extreme acts of violence on their families which made it harder for the children to return home. The global framing of children as victims of armed forces and groups was a response to this method of recruitment. It is now globally accepted that all children associated with armed forces and groups are victims of the conflict and their inability to refuse to commit acts of violence should be reflected in government and humanitarian policy and programmatic responses.

Yet it is also important to expand our understanding of children's recruitment and experiences beyond victimhood, to incorporate notions of agency and children as rights-holders. In very difficult environments, where there is an active conflict, no jobs or education and where families are living below the poverty line, the pressure on children to contribute to their family income is significant. In Afghanistan, boys are recruited by armed groups as they migrate to Iran to find work. They may be offered cash and citizenship in Iran if they go to fight in Syria for a set period. On their return to Iran, they are offered citizenship for their family if they go to Syria to fight a second time. For children migrating from abject poverty, significantly increased by the drought in Western Afghanistan, joining the armed group can become a viable economic option. In these environments, children survive and adapt, developing their own capabilities and resilience which is why they can choose to join armed groups.[7]

Children may also be perpetrators of violence and crimes during their time in armed groups, although committed under duress or manipulation. Their perpetrator status affects their own development and, if they return to their communities, it affects their acceptance and the process of that acceptance. Families and communities can find it incredibly difficult to accept children back and want to see retribution and justice, particularly when children are perceived to have 'voluntarily' join armed groups.[8]

This perception of children as victims or perpetrators is in reality more complex. Children exhibit agency, making choices and decisions that shape their lives, even if those choices are made within constrained and limited environments.[9] For instance, girls will often experience horrific levels of violence that can become normalised in armed groups, with reports of rape and gang rape common. Girls are frequently used as sex slaves or are considered as 'wives' of fighters and commanders. But we also know that girls may navigate their way to becoming connected to a powerful commander within the armed group as a form of protection for themselves and any children they have.[10] Children's agency is frequently directed at gaining security for themselves, family and friends in an

7 War Child interview with key informant
8 War Child UK, *Tug of War*
9 War Child UK, *Tug of War*
10 Mats Utas 'Young Women in the Liberian Civil War' in Alcinda Honwana and Filip De Boeck (eds), *Makes and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, Boydell and Brewer, 2005 pp.51-80

"Boys are thieves, looters, escorts, water drawers, spies. Girls are prostitutes. They have the privilege of being loved by the commanders, often, they are very proud and do not respect us if they are concubines to the commanders. If you get caught sleeping with a concubine girl to the commander, you can risk your life. The little girls keep the children and prepare to eat. Girls are often less exposed than boys. If they marry the commander, they enjoy all the protection. Boys are very neglected.

Boy, 16, formerly associated with an armed group, Democratic Republic of Congo

armed conflict[11] and children may choose to join an armed group for protection, revenge or political ideology.[12]

In reintegration programming, focusing only on children's victim status risks seeing children only as recipients of services, rather than as members and participants in their community. Similarly, failing to recognise the difficulties communities face accepting children back when children have committed atrocities undermines the importance of truth, reconciliation and justice as part of peace-building.

It is a proposition of this report that programming responds to the complex experiences that children, families and communities face. It enables individuals and groups to define what they want to change and how they want to get there, identifying their own and collective resources and skills to do so.

2.3 GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE

Despite increases in global levels of understanding of children's experiences, there are still many gaps in our knowledge about children's association and reintegration. The current evidence base is limited, with only a few longitudinal studies in existence (from Mozambique and Sierra Leone).[13] There are also limited examples of long-term programming upon which to inform programme design and development. While reintegration programmes have been in place in some conflicts for decades, long-term support to individual children is lacking. There is limited knowledge about what works in each location, as well as how many children return to armed groups, and how long they engage in programming for. There are also key evidence gaps in relation to gender, family-strengthening and emergent perceptions of children as security threats in the context of 'countering violent extremism'.

In terms of gender, girls associated with armed forces and groups have historically been marginalised from reintegration processes and in response to this there has been a recent increase in programmes focused on responding to girls' needs. However, there is a dearth of evidence on how gender norms affect girls and boys in armed groups and upon their return to communities. What is the effect of hyper-masculinities on children's – boys' and girls' – experiences? How do gender dynamics in an armed group perpetuate, exacerbate or undermine gender norms in the local community and what happens to children who challenge gender norms? For instance, girls who fight in an armed group or attain powerful positions, on their return to their families can be expected to take on domestic work, or girls that return with children can be outcast as their children were born outside of marriage. How does this affect that child and her reintegration?

The importance of family and kin – larger extended family and networks – in a child's life is clear in terms of their personal development, but how are family dynamics affected by children's association? Where do families need the most support when children return? How does children's maturity and age affect their relationships with family members? What is the long-term impact of current family-strengthening programmes? What activities work best with families when levels of poverty remain unchanged?

11 Utas, 'Young Women in the Liberian Civil War'
12 Dyan Mazurana, 'Women and NSAGs' in Carol Cohn (ed), *Women and Wars*, Polity Press, 2013, p.148
13 Neil Boothby, 'What happens when child soldiers grow up? The Mozambique Case Study', in *Intervention 2006, Volume 4* (3); Susan Shepler, *Childhood Deployed: Remaking Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone* (NYU Press 2014); Theresa Betancourt et al, 'Sierra Leone's former child soldiers: a longitudinal study of risk, protective factors and mental health' in *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*, 2010, 49(6)

The changing dynamics of conflicts in the Middle East and Africa and the emergent discourse on combating terrorism have yet to be fully analysed in terms of their impact on children and children's association with violent extremist groups. A key challenge is that children's association with terrorist armed groups means that their access to reintegration support is highly restricted, undermining a consistent global approach to reintegration of all children associated with armed forces and groups.

The UN University report, Cradled by Conflict, makes a significant contribution in the analysis of this problem, but highlighted the still-nascent understandings about many of these terrorist armed groups, and the challenge children's association with them throws up at both programmatic and policy levels.[14]

These known-unknowns highlight the need for a general deepening of understanding on the issue, and in particular the importance of rigorous context analyses and research being embedded at the programmatic level.

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14 Siobhan O'Neil and Kato van Broeckhoven (eds), Cradled by Conflict: *Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict* (UN University 2018)

3. CHILDREN'S REINTEGRATION: STANDARDS, GUIDELINES AND GOOD PRACTICE

3.1 THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL AND PROGRAMMATIC FRAMEWORK

Legally, children under 18 years of age should not be recruited by non-state armed groups. State armed forces cannot compulsorily recruit children under 18 but are able to voluntarily recruit children between 15 and 18 years of age, when certain protections are in place.[15] This is outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2002). The Rome Statute (2000) determines recruitment of children under 15 years of age is a war crime by state and non-state forces. The International Labour Organization's Convention 182 also defines forcible and compulsory recruitment as one of the worst forms of child labour.

In terms of policy and practice, The Paris Principles (2007) – and field handbook being developed at the time of writing and expected in 2019[16] – provide in-depth recommendations for children associated with armed forces and groups that reflect the importance of a holistic and individualised approach in reintegration programming. The Paris Principles remain the key reference point for practitioners. Other thematic guidance exists for practitioners on specific interventions within reintegration programming, including, the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Inter-Agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection, International Network for Education in Emergencies Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. More recently, following the UN University publication Cradled by Conflict, technical guidance has been developed for the reintegration of children associated with extremist groups in the Middle East and Africa.

In 2005, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1612 setting the framework of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism to track how state and non-state actors were meeting their obligations to children affected by armed conflict in general, including children associated with armed forces and groups. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism generates verified data about children's association with

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15 The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, a regional legal instrument, sets the age at 18 for State armed forces and non-State armed groups, commonly referred to as the straight-18 standard
16 The UN Integrated Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards are also being updated in 2019 and although not specifically focused on children's reintegration do contain some guidance

armed forces and groups. In 2017, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and Preventing the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers were created and have been endorsed by 73 States, demonstrating political commitment by policy-makers to ensure peacekeeping operations include effective prevention and child protection mechanisms within their mandates.

There is a plethora of international laws, policies and practical guidance but in reality, children's reintegration does not meet these standards. It is important to note that local rules, regulations and agreements that operate within communities also play a significant role in framing children's reintegration.

> "
> *But when children return to the community, those who have been forcibly enlisted are very well received, compared to those who have voluntarily enlisted. There is a difference in the way we receive girls and boys. Whether the girl decided to go herself or not, when she comes home everyone knows that it's a whore who returns to the community, a thief. In any case it is no longer a girl who has a value in the community and who has no morals.*
> "
>
> **NGO staff member, Democratic Republic of Congo**

3.2 WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CHILDREN'S REINTEGRATION?

Children's reintegration is the process through which children transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation. Sustainable reintegration is achieved when the political, legal, economic and social conditions needed for children to maintain life, livelihood and dignity have been secured. This process aims to ensure that children can access their rights, including formal and non-formal education, family unity, dignified livelihoods and safety from harm.[17]

Governments, UN agencies, NGOs and communities all support children's reintegration programmes designed to address their needs. Reintegration programming is – or should be - a holistic series of interventions operating at multiple levels that is flexible and tailored to the individual child. Upon leaving armed forces and groups, children have immediate needs – health, psychosocial support, access to livelihoods or education. Following this, longer-term support is provided, including family reunification, full-time education and/or skills-based training as well as ongoing psychosocial support, healthcare and legal aid where needed. Reintegration does not just impact one child – it has implications for their family or caregivers and the communities that they return to or join. Quality reintegration programmes are tailored accordingly to respond to children leaving armed forces and groups, the needs of communities to re-accept children back and to prevent re-recruitment and recruitment of other children in the future.

The stigma that children face after conflict can be intense and is often a key determinant of mental health challenges in the long-term and an inability to fully reintegrate.[18] Community stigma can assign children an 'outsider' status on their return that can hinder their reintegration. To overcome this, communities go through a process of re-assigning value to children, usually when they take up roles perceived of use to the wider community.[19] This can be further complicated when value is connected with joining armed groups to protect or defend the community. As such, concurrent interventions need to be run with families, communities and other children who have not been in an armed group to ensure children at every social level can reintegrate, their families can accept them, and their risk of re-recruitment is reduced. At a community level, interventions should help communities build their own resilience against recruitment and in the long-term prevent recruitment of children.
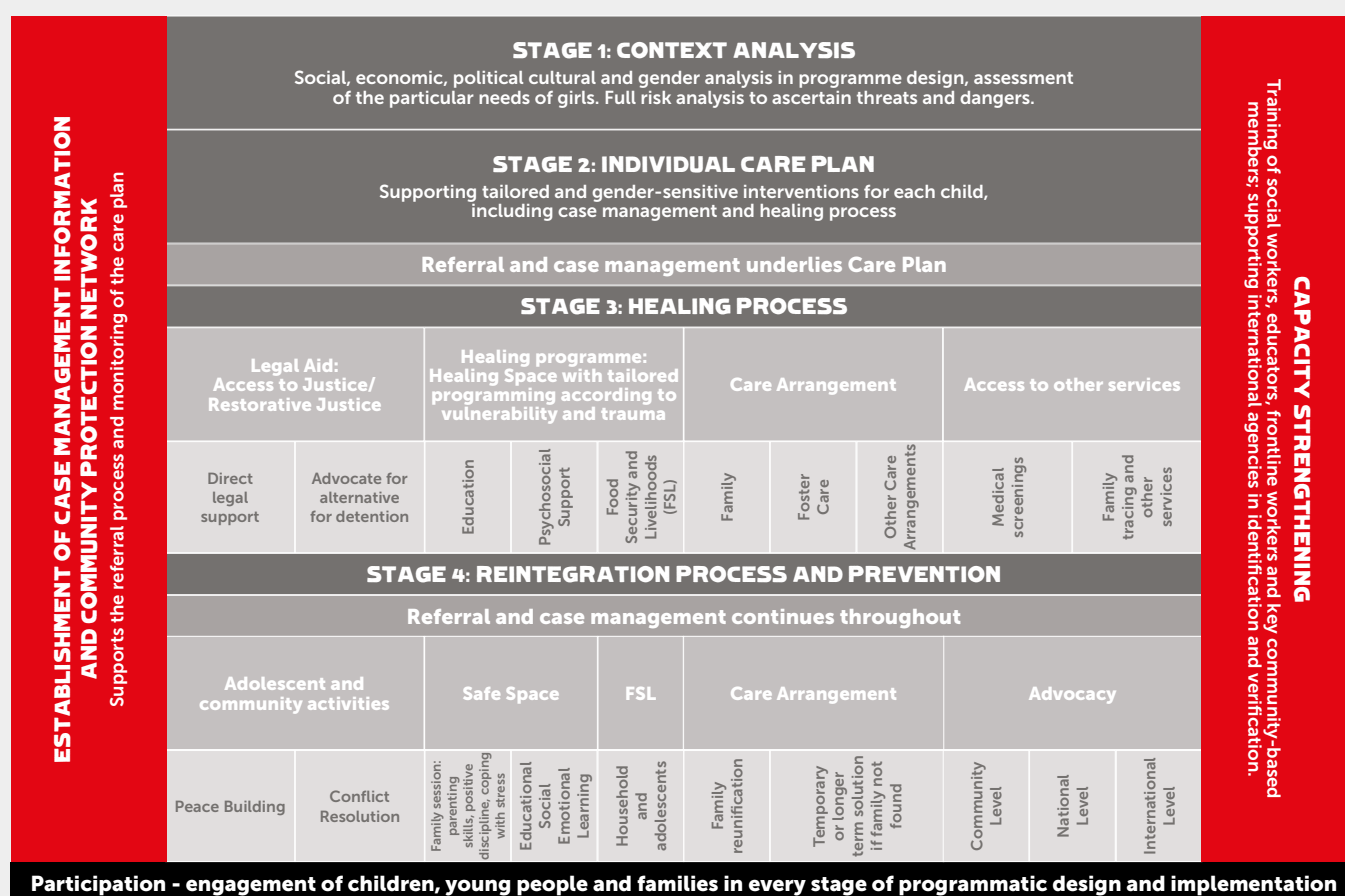
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17 Paris Principles, 2.8
18 Theresa Betancourt et al, 'Research Review: Psychosocial adjustment and mental health in former child soldiers – a systematic review of the literature and recommendations for future research' in *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* (2012)
19 Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Penguin, 1990)

This involves multiple interventions across family and caregiver-strengthening, livelihood opportunities for families and communities, and child protection networks. Context analyses are essential to informing the interventions needed at child, family and community levels and to shape the activities and how they are run. Such comprehensive social and economic reintegration takes years.

Reintegration programming also requires sufficient resources, both financial and human, to deliver such holistic interventions. Typically, a child should have one consistent social worker who can help them access support, and ensure that the appropriate family and community support is in place. De-stigmatisation activities – campaigns, knowledge exchange programmes and dialogue – targeted at reducing stigma should run simultaneously to help create conducive environments in which children experience less discrimination.

Building on the provisions of multiple legal frameworks, the Paris Principles and our own experience of delivering reintegration programmes, War Child has developed the following reintegration approach which outlines the core components of holistic, sustainable and long-term reintegration.

ESTABLISHMENT OF CASE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION NETWORK — Supports the referral process and monitoring of the care plan													CAPACITY STRENGTHENING — Training of social workers, educators, frontline workers and key community-based members; supporting international agencies in identification and verification.
STAGE 1: CONTEXT ANALYSIS Social, economic, political cultural and gender analysis in programme design, assessment of the particular needs of girls. Full risk analysis to ascertain threats and dangers.													
STAGE 2: INDIVIDUAL CARE PLAN Supporting tailored and gender-sensitive interventions for each child, including case management and healing process													
Referral and case management underlies Care Plan													
STAGE 3: HEALING PROCESS													
Legal Aid: Access to Justice/ Restorative Justice		Healing programme: Healing Space with tailored programming according to vulnerability and trauma			Care Arrangement			Access to other services					
Direct legal support	Advocate for alternative for detention	Education	Psychosocial Support	Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL)	Family	Foster Care	Other Care Arrangements	Medical screenings	Family tracing and other services				
STAGE 4: REINTEGRATION PROCESS AND PREVENTION													
Referral and case management continues throughout													
Adolescent and community activities		Safe Space		FSL	Care Arrangement			Advocacy					
Peace Building	Conflict Resolution	Family session: parenting skills, positive discipline, coping with stress	Educational Social Emotional Learning	Household and adolescents	Family reunification	Temporary or longer term solution if family not found		Community Level	National Level	International Level			
Participation - engagement of children, young people and families in every stage of programmatic design and implementation													

> " They re-enlist en-masse. Here at home, at least 7 children out of 10 re-enlist in my [armed group] after reintegration into the community. It is especially when they do not have occupations. They imagine that they have returned to the village to have a better life, but once in the village, if they realise that it will be to spend all their days doing nothing, they say better to join the [armed group]. "
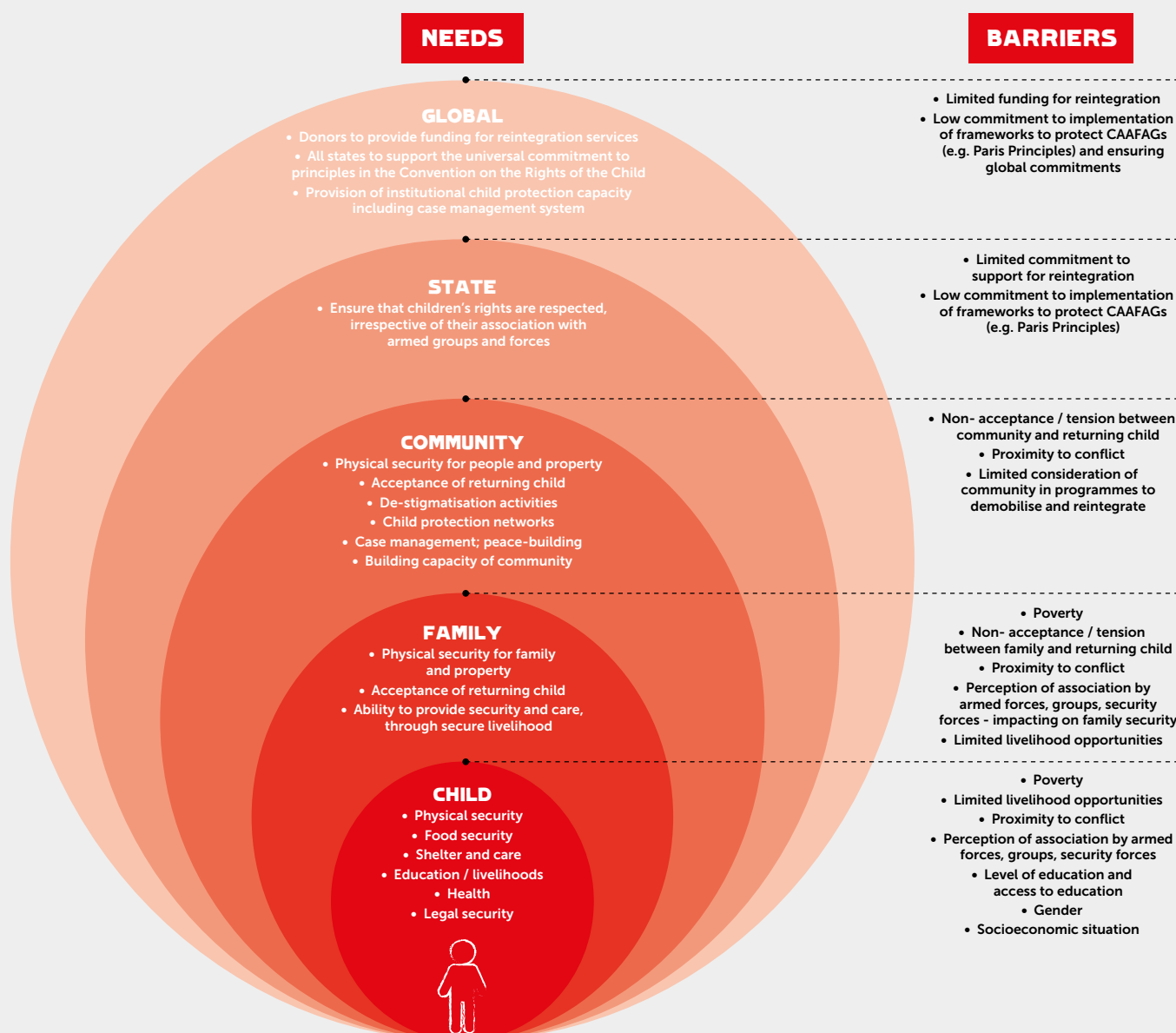
Boy, 17, formerly associated with an armed group, Democratic Republic of Congo

The previous diagram captures what War Child defines as an ideal reintegration process. We try to follow this model as far as we can, and as far as resources allow. However, it is our assessment that the following constraints are preventing optimum outcomes for children:

- Funding is not sufficient to deliver holistic programming
- Limited quality programming with too great a focus on short-term interventions
- A dearth of community-led initiatives and programming directed at addressing the root causes of children's recruitment and preventing future recruitment
- Poor institutional capacity hindering availability of reintegration support
- Exclusion of children as active citizens and from participating in change
- Legal and political classifications that deny children access to reintegration support

This report is an attempt to represent the reality of reintegration programming as experienced by children and those who are working to improve their lives and to suggest a better way forward for the sector.

NEEDS

BARRIERS

GLOBAL
- Donors to provide funding for reintegration services
- All states to support the universal commitment to principles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Provision of institutional child protection capacity including case management system

- Limited funding for reintegration
- Low commitment to implementation of frameworks to protect CAAFAGs (e.g. Paris Principles) and ensuring global commitments

STATE
- Ensure that children's rights are respected, irrespective of their association with armed groups and forces

- Limited commitment to support for reintegration
- Low commitment to implementation of frameworks to protect CAAFAGs (e.g. Paris Principles)

COMMUNITY
- Physical security for people and property
- Acceptance of returning child
- De-stigmatisation activities
- Child protection networks
- Case management; peace-building
- Building capacity of community

- Non- acceptance / tension between community and returning child
- Proximity to conflict
- Limited consideration of community in programmes to demobilise and reintegrate

FAMILY
- Physical security for family and property
- Acceptance of returning child
- Ability to provide security and care, through secure livelihood

- Poverty
- Non- acceptance / tension between family and returning child
- Proximity to conflict
- Perception of association by armed forces, groups, security forces - impacting on family security
- Limited livelihood opportunities

CHILD
- Physical security
- Food security
- Shelter and care
- Education / livelihoods
- Health
- Legal security

- Poverty
- Limited livelihood opportunities
- Proximity to conflict
- Perception of association by armed forces, groups, security forces
- Level of education and access to education
- Gender
- Socioeconomic situation

4. REIMAGINING GLOBAL FUNDING FOR CHILDREN'S REINTEGRATION

Funding constraints at a global level severely impact reintegration programming, leading to short-term funding cycles and reducing the effectiveness of programming.

In 2018, War Child UK found that between 2012-2016, funding for children's reintegration totalled US $105 million. In 2012 funding totalled US $22.1 million but in 2016 it was US $14.7 million, marking a 33% drop in global funds available. This data is from the publicly-accessible Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) Creditor Reporting System (CRS) database. This database is reliant upon donors' (mostly governments) reports and so relies on donors identifying an impact of their funding on children associated with armed forces or groups. There are so many layers within reintegration programming that there are challenges in capturing which interventions specifically are reintegration, prevention and community development, all of which are part of the reintegration trajectory. This complexity highlights the need for the humanitarian sector to assess all funding sources for children's reintegration and to determine more accurate mechanisms to capture, analyse and present funding data that details specific interventions, expenditure and children reached – as without this the funding picture remains incomplete.[20]

> *"The quality and quantity of support provided is insufficient. [It] does not address the expectations or needs of the CAFAG.*
>
> **Boy, 15, formerly associated with an armed group, Central African Republic**

However, the overall finding that there is not enough funding for children's reintegration echoes the perspectives and realities of practitioners and government representatives working at national levels, with calls for greater investment in children's reintegration consistently made at global levels. In 2017 at the tenth anniversary of the Paris Principles, states agreed on:

The need to considerably increase resources for children affected by armed conflict and their access to those resources, and to allow for predictable, consistent and long-term multi-sectoral finance for reintegration programmes.[21]

This was followed in September 2018 by the announcement of UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict to launch a Global Coalition on Reintegration to look at how children's reintegration should be improved, one aspect of which is increasing the funding available.[22]

20 War Child UK, *Closing the funding gap for the reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups*, September 2018
21 International Protect Children from War Conference conclusions statement, Paris, 21st February 2017, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/human-rights/children-s-rights/protecting-children-from-war-conference-21-february-2017/
22 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 'Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers', https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/global-coalition-for-reintegration-of-former-child-soldiers/ [accessed 5 March 2019]

> "
> *The project was helpful giving hope to the children which was very important. The assistance provided gave the possibility of starting something different. [But] the closure of the project [so soon] has impacted the children and destroyed the hope that they built.*
> "
>
> **Mother of child formerly associated with an armed group, Central African Republic**

Funding needs to be predictable, sustained and flexible to enable long-term programming that is adaptable to individual children and the context they are in. But the current lack of global funding available for reintegration is compounded by short-term funding cycles. Reintegration takes years, but too often NGOs receive grants for just six, nine or 12 months of programming. With such short funding cycles, children are only partially-supported.

For instance, in Central African Republic, War Child has historically received grants for periods of under 12 months, with which only limited support was available to children on their immediate return to their community, such as a livelihoods support kit, provision of non-food items, the option of vocational training or education – not both – and support to temporary host families.[23] Too often short-term funding in conflict settings does not provide the time needed for programmes and activities to have sufficient impact, as once programmes are up-and-running they only last for very short periods.[24]

23 War Child UK, *Reintegration of children associated with armed groups and forces CAR*
24 War Child UK, *Reintegration of children associated with armed groups and forces CAR; Child Soldiers International, What the Girls Say: Improving practices for the demobilisation and reintegration of girls associated with armed forces and armed groups in Democratic Republic of Congo* (2016)

> *The [agency] promised to train us in hairdressing and give us solar panels and other equipment that we initiate our own village barber activities. A few days later, they came to train us in carpentry and they had promised to give us tools of work so that after we start our own carpentry activities here at the village. But alas, at the end of the training they had not realised their promise, the tools they had given us were not really complete as expected. Five people were sharing one working tool while everyone should have one for himself. We realised that it was really difficult or impossible for us to start our carpentry activities with these very inadequate materials. Two friends with whom we were together in a forest [in the armed group] had proposed that we sell these small equipment and to return to the forest again. I advised friends not to sell it and wait to see if they bring us more in the future. The two friends refused and it was decided to sell these materials. They have gone back to the forest.*

Boy, 17, formerly associated with an armed group, Democratic Republic of Congo

Short-term funding cycles can be partly attributed to an over-emphasis on quantifying the impact of reintegration numerically through numbers of children reached rather than qualitatively by the programme's impact on participants. Such programming as this is ineffective, and sometimes can be harmful. For instance, skills training is often short-term, inadequate and not based on the local market's ability to absorb new labour, so children leave vocational training unable to find work. This is well-known and yet sustainable alternatives have not yet been developed.[25]

The limitations of the funding cycle also exacerbate the structural factors that cause recruitment in the first place, leading to the possibility of re-recruitment. It also does not address the fact that children associated with armed forces and groups can provide benefits to their families and communities through their association – security, food, basic needs, safety of cattle. Programming and funding must take this into account.

For instance, the humanitarian funding environment in Central African Republic is weak. Since 2014, some 13,000 children in the Central African Republic, including 3,000 girls, have been released from armed groups. Due to lack of funding, 30 per cent of these children have yet to receive reintegration assistance.[26] In 2018, UNICEF was only 54% funded. Their target to reintegrate 3,500 children was only partially met with 804 children released and receiving interim care, although this was the majority of the total 826 children released in 2018. UNICEF's 2019 target is for 3,000 children to be reintegrated.

The funding required within the child protection sector to enable this is USD $8.7 million.[27] In a country where the government has limited resources and large parts of the country are not controlled by the government, access to deliver programming is a significant barrier to effective reintegration.

As a result, reintegration programming is often a cycle of release and reinsertion programming, where focus is on removing numbers of children from armed groups with limited ability to address underlying reasons why they have joined. In Central African Republic, War Child, until last year, was in receipt of a series of

25 Dyan Mazurana and Linda Eckerbom Cole, 'Women, Girls and DDR' in Carol Cohn (ed), *Women and Wars*, Polity Press 2013, p.211
26 UNICEF, Central African Republic, https://www.unicef.org/appeals/car.html [accessed 19 February 2019]
27 UNICEF, Central African Republic, https://www.unicef.org/appeals/car.html [accessed 19 February 2019]

grants for between only six, nine and 12 months. With gaps between these short-term grants, there was limited ability to build constructive relationships with children and follow-up with them once they had been through the programmes.

War Child's 2018 analysis of global financing for reintegration showed that South Sudan was one of the highest recipients of funding, receiving USD $29.4 million between 2012-2016.[28] Yet funding is still not sufficient and funding cycles remain short-term. Funding came from the governments of Australia, Canada, Italy, Norway and the United States of America and UNICEF. In South Sudan, funding needs to flow more smoothly and there need to be longer-term grants available with quicker administrative procedures so that programmes can be started quickly and renewed promptly to prevent gaps in support for children.

In 2016 at the World Humanitarian Summit, donors, governments and practitioners committed to the Grand Bargain, a series of commitments to changing the structure of humanitarian aid, that included a commitment to increase multi-year planning and funding. This needs to translate into reality for children's reintegration. Given the inadequacy of global funding to meet children's needs, a different approach is needed – one that puts children first.

28 War Child UK, *Closing the funding gap*

SPOTLIGHT ON SOUTH SUDAN

In 2011, South Sudan gained independence from Sudan, becoming the newest country in the world. In 2013 however, a power struggle between the President Salva Kiir and his former Deputy Riek Machar led to a civil war that has continued despite several efforts to bring about peace agreements. In a region that has been afflicted by conflict since the 1950s, South Sudan suffers acute humanitarian needs. 6 million people face huge food shortages, are unable to access clean water and are at risk of malnutrition and health problems in a country where there is one primary health centre for every 50,000 people. To date, 4 million people have been displaced, 2 million internally and 2.2 million are refugees in bordering countries. In 2018, 70% of children received no education, not even temporary education from NGOs. Within the 30% who do go to school, they are more likely to be boys than girls.[29]

Multiple armed groups are active in the conflict with factions and groups forming, dissolving and re-forming as the dynamics of the conflict change.[30] The two main armed parties operating in South Sudan are: the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in Opposition (SPLA-IO) and the South Sudan People's Defence Force (SSPDF).

One constant in South Sudan's conflict is the recruitment of children. During times of increased fighting, military and opposition commanders commonly recruit children to bolster numbers to strengthen a group's capacity, although in February 2019, armed groups committed to end using children.[31] UNICEF estimates that 19,000 children are associated with armed forces and groups. This figure should be treated with some caution due to the difficulty in accessing remote parts of the country and the fluid nature of children's association with armed groups. Structural factors compound children's vulnerability to joining an armed group. In a country where 80% of the population lives below the poverty line, livelihood opportunities are minimal and the education system is largely absent, the active conflict means that it is common for children to join armed groups. Moreover, there is a loose demarcation between civilian and military life with entire communities living alongside armed groups. In single-parent households and high levels of food insecurity, the provision of meals in an armed group can be a viable survival mechanism for children and families who need to reduce the numbers of mouths to feed.

In an armed group, children are often engaged directly in fighting from the age of 12 with younger and smaller children being used in non-combat roles. Girls are also more likely to be used as 'wives' and take on domestic chores – cleaning, cooking, caring for their own and younger children in the group – in addition to fighting. Because of these domesticated roles, girls are also less likely to be released by the armed groups, being required to continue these roles for commanders. Some girls who do return are rejected and face stigma because they are perceived to be tainted. But for other girls, stigma is not a significant barrier to their reintegration. Even girls who have been pregnant and had children have been accepted back into their communities.

On paper, South Sudan does not allow for children's recruitment and supports their holistic reintegration. South Sudan acceded to the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict in 2018 and the national Constitution of South Sudan 2011 states: 'Every child has the right not to be subjected to exploitative practices or abuse, nor to be required to serve in the army' and children are under 18.[32] The Policy Paper on DDR in the Republic of South Sudan 2011 also aligns children's reintegration with the Paris Principles.

In reality, the government's National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (NDDRC), despite commitment to support the reintegration of children, is under-resourced and under-staffed.[33] UNICEF and civil society try to fill the gap, but remain under-resourced and the continuity of interventions is uncertain due to short funding cycles.

29 UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019: South Sudan* (2018)
30 International Crisis Group, *Double-edged sword: Vigilantes in African Counter-Insurgencies* (2017)
31 Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 'South Sudan's Armed Groups Commit to End Violations Against Children', https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/south-sudans-armed-groups-commit-to-end-violations-against-children/ [accessed 1 March 2019]
32 South Sudan's Constitution of 2011, 17(1)(d)
33 War Child interview with key NGO informant

5. BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL CHILD PROTECTION CAPACITY

In conflict countries, limited institutional capacity for child protection at both the State and I/NGO level impacts the effectiveness of formal reintegration processes. In such settings, national child protection institutions should be built at the same time as strengthening informal protection mechanisms to provide and enable reintegration to be better for children, families and communities.

In South Sudan, children who leave armed groups informally are unlikely to receive any reintegration support at all (as is also the case in many other countries for children who leave informally).[34] To date, major formal release only happens in two locations – Pibor and Yambio – essentially meaning that official reintegration also only happens there, while other children (but unlikely all) are absorbed in the caseloads of various NGOs.

Typically, children's reintegration includes obtaining a certificate of release; getting a reintegration kit consisting of clothes, food rations, school support; family identification and reunification where possible; psychosocial support; education or non-formal vocational training; and access to health services.

A key challenge is that there are so few case workers that it is simply not possible to meet every child's needs and meet the minimum standard of South Sudan's Case Management Standard Operating Procedures. For example, the Case Management Task Force has learned that most cases remain open for between two to three years and a short funding cycle poses the risk of being counter-productive if interventions are not followed through – particularly for reintegration cases that require more time.[35]

> ❝ I felt abandoned when I received no follow up visits. I felt like they do not care. ❞
>
> **Boy, 18, formerly associated with an armed group, Central African Republic**

Moreover, short-term grants mean that NGOs cannot maintain salary payments and social workers will often change jobs. If a grant finishes within 12 months and social workers move jobs, there can be gaps of up to four months in providing reintegration services due to finding and training new staff. Even when NGOs have different sources of funding to continue programming, the movement of a limited number of social workers can seriously affect the availability and quality of reintegration. The turnover of social workers also means that children have to build new relationships during a particularly sensitive time leading to a breakdown of trust with the NGO; and trust is central to the success of a child-social worker relationship.

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34 This barrier to reintegration is addressed in chapter eight below
35 War Child interview with key informant

A similar picture is evidence in the Democratic Republic of Congo where institutional capacity and in particular government infrastructure for child protection is lacking. For example, there is no child protection legal qualification, which means there are no legal experts trained on children's rights or child protection systems. This also means NGOs step in to fill the gap — for example War Child has trained lawyers, police and civil servants across the country.

There are parallels that can be drawn with the under-funding of child protection globally. In real terms, this means a reduction in the number of posts in UN agencies focused on child protection and as a result less priority given to children in national and international fora.[36] Reintegration sits within the child protection sector.

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36 UN Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms Virginia Gamba, Remarks, 'Protecting Girls and Boys in Shrinking Humanitarian Space – UN Security Council Open Arria Meeting' 21 February 2019, https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/protecting-boys-and-girls-in-shrinking-humanitarian-space-un-security-council-open-arria-meeting/ [accessed 8 April 2019]

6. PREVENTION AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

In the past two decades 130,000 children have been formally released from armed groups and undergone a process of disarmament and demobilisation.[37] As the legal framework surrounding child recruitment and use has been strengthened, so too have efforts to support children to leave armed forces and groups. However there has been a disproportionate emphasis on quantifying the numbers of children released and tracking their involvement in relatively short-term I/NGO programmes, rather than taking a more comprehensive approach that assesses their environment, their community and the factors that make them vulnerable to being recruited or lead them to struggle to reintegrate.

> "
> *[Who are the people who encourage children not to enlist in armed groups?]*
>
> *The former demobilised, that is, those who had enlisted and then left and therefore aware of the situation in the armed groups.*
> "
>
> **Boy, 15, Democratic Republic of Congo**

The success of reintegration support depends on working with communities to determine effective mechanisms of programming and supporting the community to enable reintegration rather than focussing on the individual child alone. Decades of programming of individual-level interventions demonstrate that children continue to re-join armed groups when the programmes offered are stretched thinly to reach larger numbers of children year-on-year rather than stay with the same children long-term. Working with a community means embedding reintegration programming into broader development objectives and peace-building dialogues.

This can involve developing economic opportunities for other children, adults and families as well as for children formerly associated with groups, raising awareness of children's experiences in armed groups and strengthening existing community child protection mechanisms and networks. It means prioritising working with families, helping develop alternatives to negative punishment techniques, helping parents and caregivers to cope with stress, building from what already exists rather than inadvertently undermining already-established support mechanisms in the community. For instance, in Sierra Leone traditional cleansing rituals helped children to put their experiences in an armed force or group behind them and be re-accepted into their communities.[38]

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37 UN Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, 'Lessons learned and best practices' https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/lessons-learned-and-best-practices/ [accessed 10 April 2019]

38 Betancourt et al. (2010) 'Past Horrors, Present Struggles: The Role of Stigma in the Association between War Experiences and Psychosocial Adjustment among Former Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone', *Social Science and Medicine*, 70: 17-26

It also means supporting children to help one another; children have demonstrated abilities to leave armed groups themselves and to prevent the involvement of other children in the armed group.[39]

This is an approach that understands and responds to the wider context the child is situated within and the relationships that influence them – working with children, their peers, families and wider support networks (teachers, religious leaders, employers).

As outlined in the previous section, State capacity is often lacking or entirely absent, and in this context focusing on informal community support structures becomes even more important. Where capacity and funding constraints mean that social worker engagement with children is infrequent, it is challenging for these social workers to build trusting relationships with children, and they risk being seen as outsiders. In the absence of functioning formal protection systems, it is critical to work with local community members who know the child's local environment. This approach ensures that community-based child protection is supported and in place where formal State systems are weak, poorly functioning or absent. This does not mitigate against the need to invest in formal systems, but rather emphasises the importance of community-based interventions to complement – or supplement – such provision.

The importance of working closely with the community and building on its strengths is highlighted by War Child's programmatic experience. In Colombia, War Child works with indigenous groups in rural areas. There are 500 recognised indigenous groups (with more unrecognised), making up approximately 4% of the population. For these groups, it is the community that holds the group together. In a context where the armed conflict is shifting and minority groups are marginalised, community protection is paramount. As such, sense of community is much more important than the individual. This is a key cultural factor that must be embedded into reintegration programming in Colombia.[40] War Child's Juntos (Together) programme recognises this and has adopted culturally sensitive methodologies to adapt interventions so that they work with and for the community. The most significant elements of this are including enough time with the community to determine how they want to implement interventions, and ensuring staff are recruited locally.

These two elements enable War Child to build trust with the community and ensure relevance of the programming. Many indigenous groups distrust the government and NGOs because commonly, it is these actors who institutionalise children – children who are released from armed groups are placed in transit centres away from their families. Institutionalisation has been evidenced to be harmful to children's development, preventing family-based relationships and support structures from functioning well. And yet it is still a typical reintegration model.[41] This is not the only reason indigenous groups are mistrustful – in rural areas the state is almost entirely absent and already in 2019 13 social leaders have been killed, exacerbating feelings of marginalisation and mistrust.[42] For indigenous groups, when an individual is affected, the entire community is affected. Therefore, removing children is felt intensely by the entire community, increasing mistrust of outsiders dictating what is in their children's best interests. To overcome this, it was local staff, from the area, who worked with community

39 Maria Camila Ospina-Alvarado, Sara Victoria Alvarado, Jamie Alberto Carmona and Hector Fabio Ospina, 'A Social Constructionist Approach to Undersanding the Experiences of Girls Affected by Armed Conflict in Colombia' in Myriam Denov and Bree Akesson (Eds), *Children Affected by Armed Conflict: Theory, Method and Practice* (Colombia University Press, 2017) p.101
40 The importance of community is not unique to Colombia and is also found in African contexts in which War Child works
41 Michael Wessells, 'Children and Armed Conflict: Interventions for Supporting War-Affected Children' in *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 2017 Vol 23 (1)
42 WOLA, Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas https://www.wola.org/2019/02/human-rights-social-leaders-killed-colombia-january-2019/ (accessed 1st April 2019)

> **"**
>
> *When the demobilised see that the cause that pushed them out into this group is not answered and he still has financial crisis, no job, they go home to the armed group.*
>
> **"**
>
> **Boy, 16, formerly associated with an armed group, Democratic Republic of Congo**

> **"**
>
> *The child who leaves the armed group must be protected in the family and in the community and show him that he is well loved like other children in the community and the family.*
>
> **"**
>
> **Boy, 12, formerly associated with an armed group, Democratic Republic of Congo**

> **"**
>
> *My family members love and embrace me, but this is not the same with community members who are afraid of me. They see me as a child who can do anything bad. Children are very much afraid of me.*
>
> **"**
>
> **Boy, 16, formerly associated with an armed group, Democratic Republic of Congo**

members to create safe spaces for participatory dialogue across the community. In these safe spaces, the community discussed what the reintegration programme should look like. Community ownership was imperative and to enable it to happen War Child had to slow down the usual implementation process.

In prioritising a culturally relevant response, War Child learned that reintegration only focused on individual children is incomplete because it does not also work with the community as a whole. In following the community's lead, War Child built upon what was already in existence and could focus on strengthening the child protection mechanisms and networks in place rather than trying to re-create them. This started from a 'strengths-based' approach, recognising the capacities of the community and supporting them when they identified what they needed to strengthen children's reintegration. This approach is being further tested in the Central African Republic, where War Child is taking two different approaches to reintegration. In one community, a typical reintegration package is being delivered by NGOs. In the second community, participatory research is being undertaken to achieve a locally-defined approach to reintegration, with accompanying funding to support those activities. It is anticipated that the findings of this will contribute to the evidence-base on community-led approaches to reintegration, promoting community participation and ownership of children's successful reintegration.

War Child sees this as a shift to systems-strengthening at informal levels, i.e., investing in community-led approaches that emphasise the resilience and capabilities of children, their families and communities than a deficit or needs-based approach. If children's reintegration is approached in terms of what children lack, it can easily become a top-down provision of services driven by outsiders. The concept of systems-strengthening builds on the capabilities that already exist within the community. This shift to systems-strengthening needs to happen at multiple levels, (home, school, hospitals, local authorities and national government) recognising the socio-ecological model of children's development.[43] Programmatically this means being adaptable, strategic and responsive to context, which also requires donor flexibility.

Some donors are adapting and taking a longer-term view such as, UN Peace Building Fund and DFID's Aid Connect fund – which are making efforts to take a systems-approach to addressing children's reintegration to include prevention and community-led development.

43 Michael G. Wessels, 'Children and Armed Conflict: Interventions for Supporting War-Affected Children' in *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology 2017 Vol 23*

SPOTLIGHT ON COLOMBIA

The conflict in Colombia has been ongoing since the 1950s. In 2016, the government signed a Peace Agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – Army of the People (FARC-EP). Even though there has been a de-escalation of the conflict with armed groups, violence from other organised groups such as FARC-EP dissidents and so-called 'criminal gangs' continue.[44] Since the FARC-EP's demobilization in 2016, the presence of other armed groups has become evident in the territories that used to be under control of FARC-EP. Such groups are involved in drug trafficking, territorial control and murders of community leaders. There are many different armed groups in Colombia including – FARC-EP dissidents who have formed new groups, two long-standing rebel paramilitary groups are still active: the National Liberation Army and the Popular Liberation Army, urban criminal gangs, often backed by armed groups and drug traffickers. Colombia is administratively divided into 32 state departments and armed violence has taken place in almost all of them.

Government and state infrastructure is largely absent in rural areas. Access to remote areas is severely affected by the presence of armed groups which control communities' movements – there was a 708% increase in the confinement of communities between 2017 and 2018 and displacement of entire communities – Colombia has the highest number of internally displaced persons in the world. The Unit for the Victims Assistance and Reparation has records of 7.3 million victims of internal forced displacement, from the beginning of the conflict to the year 2019.[45] These numbers are likely higher given many areas are difficult to access to verify numbers. Armed groups and criminal groups frequently control territory, drug production and illegal mining in areas that are also impacted by environmental degradation by the government and the private sector.

The increase in organised criminal groups since the 2016 Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP, has led to an increase in the recruitment, use and utilisation of children. UN verified data suggests 169 children were recruited in 2017 and 285 entered a demobilisation programme,[46] however, during the FARC-EP demobilisation process, despite expectations of a high number of children leaving, only 134[47] children were registered as having left the group to join the 'Differential Pathway of Life' programme. Accurate figures of association are almost impossible to obtain but practitioners estimate they are much higher – children who are associated often still live with their families and their involvement falls under the radar.

Children's recruitment is much less visible in Colombia than in other contexts. Children may not even know that they are supporting an armed group. Often, children's association begins by running errands for family friends or neighbours. Children are asked to deliver a package to someone in a neighbouring village, without realising it is drugs, weapons or a death threat. Over time, children's association increases to information gathering – reporting on what people are doing in their village, who comes to visit and what they say. Families are often unable to refuse that their children are involved in the armed group and sometimes, families see it as a form of protection to have different children in different armed groups. In addition, the age of maturity, culturally, particularly in rural and agricultural communities in Colombia is lower, with children contributing to their family's livelihood.

44 Razon Publica, *Violence and Crime after the Implementation of Peace Agreements*, https://razonpublica.com/index.php/conflicto-drogas-y-paz-temas-30/10403-violencia-y-criminalidad-tras-la-implementaci%C3%B3n-de-los-acuerdos-de-paz.html [accessed 20 February 2019]
45 UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018
46 UN General Assembly and Security Council, *Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary General* (A/72/865 – S/2018/465), para 48
47 Different actors estimate between 130-136 children were released by FARC-EP

7. PUTTING CHILDREN AT THE HEART OF REINTEGRATION PLANNING

As seen in global trends of reintegration funding and programming, children who leave armed groups remain vulnerable to re-recruitment because they return to communities where there are high levels of poverty, insecurity and violence. Some of the most marginalised children remain marginalised, excluded and hard to reach, facing scarcity of resources, stigmatisation within their communities and inadequate support from NGOs, government and international donors.

This is not to undermine the difficulties facing donors when making decisions about where to spend their money. It is hard to prioritise in conflicts when there are so many needs. But too often in children's reintegration, programming is short-term and there is an over-emphasis on numbers as a reaction to the emergency rather than long-term planning. Inherent within this approach is programming designed and based on what others perceive children's needs to be with minimal, if any, participation of children informing programming and policy development.

Anecdotal evidence from children and families in Central African Republic who have received reintegration support indicates that it is more valuable to sell the reintegration kits from NGOs – made up of school materials and other non-food items – than to use them for their intended purpose. The kits are not sufficiently contextualised and relevant to children's immediate needs, so they become a source of income.[48] What if we asked the children what they need? And what if they had a bigger platform to inform decision-makers about what they actually need?

Children's participation can be transformational. When children participate in decision-making it can positively impact them, their peers and their wider community. Peer-led support networks in Uganda have been seen to have longer-term benefits for children than traditional reintegration programming. Children formerly associated with armed groups were trained in counselling techniques and ten years after the civil war they were still being sought out as a support mechanism by other children and young people in the community.[49]

Participation is also key to transitional justice – the process of recognising the atrocities of the conflict and providing space for the country to recognise what happened to the victims and to see perpetrators held to account, embedding reconciliation into justice and rule of law initiatives aimed at moving the country out of conflict. In Colombia, the National Historical Memorial Centre was

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48 War Child interviews with child stakeholders
49 Theresa Betancourt, et al, 'High Hopes, Grim Reality: Reintegration and the Education of Former Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone' in *Comparative Education Review Vol 52*(4) (2008)

established to strengthen transitional justice efforts. As part of this, the Centre undertook a data initiative – the Observatory of Memory and Conflict – to record the time, date, place and person affected by acts of violence committed during the conflict from 1958 – 2018. Part of this process was to capture the testimony of former members of armed groups, some of whom were children at the time of interview, but most of whom joined the armed group when they were children and were interviewed as adults. The interviews capture their experiences and perspectives of the conflict, including suggestions of how things need to change.[50] If these testimonies are listened to, they have the potential to fundamentally change Colombia's approach to reintegration, helping the government, donors and NGOs to learn from mistakes, not to make assumptions about what children need and to come up with different ideas to make reintegration interventions more impactful.

SPOTLIGHT ON CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The Central African Republic has faced an ongoing and protracted conflict since independence in 1960 but the most recent conflict began in 2013 when a coalition of armed groups, Seleka, having gained control in the north and central areas of Central African Republic, also took over the capital Bangui. In 2018, violence was still a very present reality – two internally displaced person camps, housing 90,000 people, were torched by armed groups. Civilians were shot dead and burnt alive.[51] Violence is being reported in areas that have not seen violence before. Since 2012, seven peace agreements have been signed, all of which have collapsed.[52] The latest round of peace negotiations began in January 2019 and a peace agreement was signed on 2nd February 2019 between the government and 14 armed groups. Children are not engaged in formal peace negotiations and rarely in peace-building dialogue at local levels, despite UN Security Council Resolution 2250 mandating youth involvement in peace processes.[53]

War Child has been running VoiceMore, our youth empowerment programme, in Central African Republic for three years. In Bangui, children have led a campaign to eradicate so-called 'sex for grades' sexual abuse and coercion in schools, securing the support of UNICEF and the Ministry of Education to take action.[54] In Central African Republic, two new groups, composed of formerly-associated children and host community children who were not associated with armed groups, are being assembled to identify and resolve issues in their communities.

Generally, children and young people who are or were associated with armed groups are dismissed by local and national policy-makers as unimportant, ignorant and trouble-makers, reinforcing negative perceptions of them in general and heightening the negative stereotypes these young people face. Yet, these children have extensive networks and in-depth understanding of the local dynamics of the conflict and their community's needs.

50 Observatorio de Memoria y Conflicto, http://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/observatorio/ [accessed 12 February 2019]
51 Amnesty International, 'CAR: Up to 100 civilians shot and burnt alive as UN peacekeepers leave posts in Alindao', 14 December 2018, [accessed 4 March 2019]
52 International Crisis Group, Central African Republic February 2019 https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/february-2019#central-african-republic [accessed 4 March 2019]
53 UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (SC/12149) 2015
54 VoiceMore, Combatting Corruption and Abuse in Schools, https://www.warchild.org.uk/sites/default/files/link-files/voicemore_car_report_corruption_and_child_abuse_in_schools_0.pdf

Children are experts of their own lives and are as well-placed as adults to advise on both their own and their community's needs. While the level of engagement and influence over decision-making should be weighted and in-line with the evolving capacities and maturity of each child, a fundamental strand or mechanism of reintegration programming must be children's participation, with specific interventions adapted to what children identify as priorities. Children may determine that they want programming that NGOs already provide, such as support getting into school, business training, start-up investment and family-support. But children may prioritise other forms of support, such as making the route to school safer, building a road into town or establishing farming co-operatives. It might also result in adjustments to the structure and delivery of existing programmes that improves levels of engagement and sustainability.

War Child's 'VoiceMore' programme seeks to address this participation deficit. The programme works with groups of children and young people to identify needs in their community, conduct research on the topic and then conduct campaigns to create change. The VoiceMore has been deployed in War Child's programming with children in Jordan, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Iraq, and more recently in 2019 is being embedded into a UN Peacebuilding Fund initiative that War Child is delivering in the Central African Republic with a focus on reintegration.

This new approach to War Child's reintegration programming starting in Central African Republic embeds participation within it – informing the typical reintegration interventions, livelihoods support and psychosocial support, but also catapulting children's voices into peace dialogue. Although it only started this year, in 2019, this model of programming demonstrates a willingness to approach reintegration differently, avoiding an over-emphasis on children as perpetrators of the conflict or victims of the conflict and recognise children's agency.[55] The most significant element of this UN Peace Building Fund grant is the involvement of children not just in programme design, but in the peace-building process itself. Children will directly feed into change and this is what is innovative – emphasising the knowledge and expertise they have on their own lives, engaging children who really know what it is like to be in an armed group, to leave and to reintegrate.

55 Mark Drumbl, *Reimagining Child Soldiers in International Law and Policy*, (Oxford University Press 2012)

8. ENSURING ALL CHILDREN ACCESS QUALITY REINTEGRATION

Perhaps the biggest practical challenge to reintegration is that many children are not even able to access reintegration support when they leave armed groups because of legal and policy restrictions. This happens when political and security considerations take precedence over children's rights. Too frequently, children in non-State armed groups are seen as a threat to national security and children in State aligned groups and armed forces are seen as a symbol of patriotism, legitimising children's involvement and hindering their access to reintegration.

In many countries, active conflict and lack of infrastructure means it is incredibly difficult to physically access areas where children are leaving armed groups and in some instances that access is denied. In South Sudan, the only current official DDR sites for children are in two locations: Pibor and Yambio. For children who exit a group away from these areas, there is no formal support.

Even in Colombia where there is a comprehensive legal and policy framework that formalises demobilisation and reintegration and there are mandated government institutions with resources to deliver reintegration, in practice it is not available to all children. Only children released from armed groups that are recognised by the government receive reintegration services. The proliferation of armed groups since the peace process with the FARC-EP and the government's interest in protecting global kudos gained from the peace process has resulted in a reluctance to recognise other armed groups. When children leave a group they are provided with a certificate affirming they have left the group and can receive reintegration support, but if the group is not recognised or if they are unable to prove they were in the group, they do not get the certificate and are placed in detention. These political nuances affect which children can receive reintegration support and leads to a disparity in the provision of reintegration and whether children are treated as victims at all.

In the last decade, the dynamics of conflicts have changed and an increase in the number of violent extremist armed groups has led to national and global efforts to counter violent extremism. In these contexts, laws and policies have been introduced that prioritise national security over children's rights and that in some instances have justified violations of children's rights — including detention, torture, abuse, denial of access to services, exclusion and extreme stigma, particularly when the armed group children are associated with, or perceived to be associated with, is in opposition to the government.[56]

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56 Human Rights Watch, *'Everyone must confess': Abuses against children suspected of ISIS-affiliation in Iraq* (2019)

> **"**
> *In our community, a child who surrenders is often arrested. This is why the child arrested for enlisting, once released, re-enrols once again in the armed group fearing being arrested again.*
> **"**
>
> **Father of child associated with armed group, Democratic Republic of Congo**

Laws and policies designed to counter violent extremism treat children primarily as security threats. This is problematic for multiple reasons, including that there are no legally or internationally-agreed definitions of 'terrorism' or 'extremism', so the terms are used inconsistently.[57] But more importantly, when children are identified as security threats or terrorists, evidence suggests that their rights as children are disregarded – and consequently, funding for reintegration programming diminishes. This can most clearly be seen in the extreme lack of funding for reintegration programming in the Countering/Preventing Violent Extremism-labelled conflict of Iraq and the availability of funding in Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia and South Sudan (to name a few). Conversely, despite UN assertions that 'terrorism' and 'violent extremism' do not pertain to any one religion, ideology, country or region,[58] Countering/Preventing Violent Extremism initiatives are most often operated in countries in the Middle East and Africa.

The label of children as security threats is not new, and has existed in multiple conflicts around the world – in Democratic Republic of Congo children suspected of association with armed groups are detained.[59] Extreme violence is not unique – in 2017 in Central African Republic, armed group attacks on villages led to at least 70 people killed, 70 injured and 4,500 displaced;[60] and the brutality of the Lords Resistance Army in Uganda is well-documented. These terms ignore the causes of why and how children become associated with armed groups. In effect they transfer responsibility from the state to respond to complex and structural drivers of recruitment, to the child for becoming associated. In practice this negates children's need for reintegration support.

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57 O'Neil and van Broeckhoven, *Cradled by Conflict*
58 UN Secretary-General, Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2015)
59 Human Rights Watch, Extreme measures: Abuses against children detained as national security threats (2016)
60 Human Rights Watch, 'Central African Republic: Civilians Targeted as Violence Surges' 27 October 2017, https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/27/central-african-republic-civilians-targeted-violence-surges [accessed 6 March 2019]

SPOTLIGHT ON IRAQ

The conflict in Iraq is decades-long. After the Iran-Iraq war in 1980-1988 and Gulf War in Kuwait in 1991, economic sanctions on Iraq impoverished much of the country and so at the time of the UK-backed US invasion of Iraq in 2003, much of the country was already living in poverty. In 2006 and again in 2014 a resurgence of violence saw huge parts of the country face active conflict, particularly in the disputed territories between the Kurdistan Region and the Federal Government of Iraq, between state forces and state-affiliated forces and extremist armed groups. The increase in non-state armed groups has been driven largely by economic, social and political factors: a largely absent state, a collapsing agro-economy, state corruption and exclusion and basic needs not being met.[61]

In Iraq, children's association with armed forces and groups is varied. Since the Islamic State insurgency gained ground in 2014 children's association has fallen broadly into several categories: ISIS-affiliated, Popular Mobilization Forces affiliated (PMF is an umbrella grouping for multiple armed forces and groups), state PMF affiliated and non-combatant girls (kidnapped by ISIS, girls used as sex slaves by ISIS fighters).[62] Children can be recruited into armed groups through child marriage,[63] economic vulnerability,[64] a group taking control of their town or village,[65] or being born in areas under the control of armed groups.[66] Under the YBS[67] in Sinjar, girls take on fighting roles as boys have done under non-state armed groups such as ISIS.

Numbers of children who have been associated with armed forces and groups in Iraq are difficult to quantify and, for the same reasons as in the conflicts discussed above, any figures should be treated with a degree of caution. The UN Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict has verified 109 cases of recruitment by the PMF and ISIS and 1,036 children in detention, 345 in the Kurdistan Region on the grounds of association with ISIS.[68] Due to the high threshold of evidence for UN verified grave violations these figures are likely an underestimate.

In Iraq, the exclusion of children associated with armed forces and groups is present in national legal and policy frameworks. Iraq has child protection and juvenile justice laws, intended to protect children from rights violations and uphold juvenile justice standards, but under anti-terror laws and policies, children associated with or suspected of association with ISIS or ISIS-affiliated groups are seen as a national security threat, rather than as children affected by armed conflict. Juvenile justice standards exist to protect children in such scenarios: judicial proceedings should always be a last resort where children are concerned,[69] but arrest and detention has become normalised in this context.[70] This retributive approach towards ISIS-affiliated children has an exclusionary effect on their access to reintegration services and a knock-on effect for reintegration funding.

61 Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History*, (Princeton University Press 2016)
62 War Child interview with key informant
63 O'Neil and Broeckhoven, *Cradled by Conflict* p.217 and 231
64 UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Humanitarian Needs Overview Iraq 2019
65 OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Iraq 2019
66 OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Iraq 2019
67 Sinjar Resistance Units
68 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 'Iraq' https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/where-we-work/iraq/ [accessed 11 February 2019]
69 The Neuchâtel Memorandum on Good Practices for Juvenile Justice in a Counterterrorism Context reaffirms international juvenile justice standards and the centrality of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
70 O'Neil and van Broeckhoven, *Cradled by Conflict* p.218; Human Rights Watch, *'Everyone must confess'*

The legal and political categorisation of armed forces and groups that children are associated with impacts their reintegration support. In Iraq, children associated with extremist groups are deemed national security threats and children in state or state-affiliated armed groups seen as patriotic, defending their country against attack, by communities, local government and national government. The terms 'terrorist' and 'violent extremist' have become politicised, over-simplified and used to describe diverse armed groups.[71] As a result, this dichotomy does not enable discussion, understanding and learning about the specific needs of children in these different forces and groups and the need for reintegration cannot be directly addressed – individuals cannot talk about it, organisations cannot publicly acknowledge the need for it (for fear of losing access to communities and placing individual children and their families at risk) and ultimately, funding is significantly limited.[72] In this climate, NGOs cannot develop the sophisticated understanding of the needs of children to respond effectively: what specific experiences do children have in these armed groups, how can their needs be best met, how are they recruited, and how can this be prevented?[73]

Children in Iraq, as in other conflicts, need access to reintegration support that is strengths-based, community-based and that supports children and their peers to access education, vocational skills-training, psychosocial support and helps their families access economic opportunities. Perhaps most importantly at this current time, children need re-acceptance by their communities. This should be integrated into social cohesion and reconciliation work that addresses the grief and grievances that currently divide Iraq. Programmatic technical guidance specifically for children associated with extremist armed groups is not dissimilar from quality reintegration programming around the world: treat children as rights-holders and focus on the best interests of the child, ensure context analyses inform the interventions and an individualised strengths-based approach, invest in long-term programming and engage children in designing programmes.[74]

The long-term impact of not accessing reintegration support can be huge, leading to social exclusion and marginalisation, undermining efforts for social cohesion, community development and child protection. In 2018, research from University College London confirmed what many in the humanitarian sector have thought for decades – that social exclusion increases an individual's likelihood of engaging in violent extremism,[75] precisely what security agendas are intended to prevent. Mercy Corps has also found that State violence against citizens is a key driver of political violence[76] sometimes despite NGO programming to alleviate some of the economic drivers of conflict.[77]

Government, donors, UN agencies and NGOs need to move beyond simplified depictions of children associated with armed forces and groups, to appreciate the complexity of association and work to de-politicise and de-stigmatise children's association for effective reintegration support. This is vital to open up political routes for funding, dialogue and long-term, community-based and strengths-based reintegration that addresses the root causes of children's recruitment, prevents future recruitment and reintegrates those currently excluded from society.

71 O'Neil and van Broeckhoven, *Cradled by Conflict*
72 War Child interview with key informant
73 O'Neil and van Broeckhoven, *Cradled by Conflict*, pp.30-31
74 UN University, *Cradled by Conflict: Preventing and Responding to Child Recruitment and Use in Contemporary Conflicts, Implications for Programming – Technical Note* (2018)
75 Clara Pretus et al., 'Neural and Behavioural Correlates of Sacred Values and Vulnerability to Violent Extremism' in *Frontiers in Psychology Vol.9* (2018)
76 Mercy Corps, *Can Economic Interventions Reduce Violence? Impacts of Vocational Trainings and Cash Transfers on Youth Support for Political Violence in Afghanistan* (2018)
77 Mercy Corps, *Can Economic Interventions Reduce Violence?*

The current provision of reintegration support is far from what is envisaged in international human rights and humanitarian law and policy: funding is not available to meet the global standards, posing a very real constraint on implementation of holistic programming for children; the focus on removing numbers of children from armed forces and groups without providing quality, community-based reintegration undermines efforts; and the prioritisation of national security over children's rights denies too many children access to reintegration support. These barriers need to be removed to ensure sustainable reintegration that prevents children from being re-recruited and that contributes to re-building social cohesion for marginalised children, their families and communities in the long-term.

All children should have access to quality, context-specific and individualised reintegration support, irrespective of the armed force or group that they are associated with. To make this is a reality, War Child recommends that:

1. CHILDREN AND COMMUNITIES PARTICIPATE IN PROGRAMME DESIGN AND POLICY RESPONSE

Governments, donors and UN agencies should:

- Include children in peace-building dialogues and processes at local, national and regional levels

UN agencies and NGOs should:

- Embed participation as a mechanism of reintegration programming and enable children's meaningful contribution to programme design, implementation and evaluation

- Share power with children and communities (women's groups, religious leaders, teachers, parent-teacher associations, civil society organisations) in designing, implementing and evaluating programmes

2. REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMING BUILDS ON EXISTING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY

UN agencies and NGOs should:

- Build on the knowledge and expertise of local NGOs and civil society organisations to deliver reintegration programming, as local actors are the best placed to understand the children's and communities' needs and to respond to them appropriately within existing support structures

- Ensure that reintegration programmes do not focus solely on reducing numbers of children in armed forces and groups without also increasing the length and quality of interventions available to children, their peers, families and communities

- Include other vulnerable children in interventions to reduce stigma and prevent further recruitment

- Limit the placement of children in transit or detention centres that institutionalise children and slow down their reconnection with family and community by increasing the provision of alternative family-based and community-based care

- Support families to accept children back by alleviating stressors in family-life, such as enabling access to livelihoods opportunities, addressing stigma, reducing food insecurity, providing resilience-based parenting techniques and offering psychosocial support to adults

3. THE EVIDENCE-BASE FOR QUALITY REINTEGRATION SUPPORT IS IMPROVED

Governments and donors should:

- Use research, including locally-produced research, to inform policy responses to ensure policy is inclusive, flexible and relevant to the reintegration needs of all children

UN agencies and I/NGOs should:

- Embed participatory research at every stage of the programme cycle – conducting rigorous context analyses to continuously improve the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes

- Invest in longitudinal studies from varied contexts and academic disciplines to increase knowledge of the long-term impacts of reintegration programming to develop sustainable approaches

- Ensure research includes the most marginalised and excluded children, taking account of gender, age, disability and other minority status

4. INVEST IN GOVERNMENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPACITY

Governments and donors should:

- Increase the allocation of resources of national governments for child protection, taking into account the importance of local staff to be present for children and strengthen informal support mechanisms in the absence of sufficient state infrastructure

- Invest in skills building for the social workforces of national governments and local organisations to ensure social workers can have a long-term relationship with individual children and families based on trust, empathy and support

- Invest in multi-sectoral child protection systems at formal and informal levels so children in need of reintegration support are identified and adequately supported with services adapted to their specific needs (with adaptations made for age, maturity, gender, disability)

- Strengthen state institutions around truth, reconciliation and justice, providing them with resources to prioritise children's reintegration

5. RESOURCES FOR REINTEGRATION ARE SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED

Governments and donors should:

- Redress the imbalances in reintegration provision, particularly the lack of funding and access to services for children's reintegration in conflicts characterised by violent extremism

- Reverse the decline in reintegration funding, through a financial uplift to support multi-year, predictable, sustained and flexible funding for children's reintegration

- Create funding mechanisms and adapt funding requirements and administrative procedures to enable a smoother and quicker flow of money between donors and grantees and avoid gaps in support for children

- Make funding data publicly available and co-ordinate reporting to enable consistent analysis of reporting across all donors (government, multilateral and private) and recipient countries

Governments, donors, UN agencies and I/NGOs should:

- Adopt a long-term view of funding for reintegration, investing in programming that supports children's, their peers', families' and communities' resilience and social cohesion through a strategic decision to prioritise child protection, education, psychosocial support and livelihoods initiatives over (at least) five years

- Global funds should be governed by a diverse group of reintegration actors (at civil society organisation, I/NGO, UN, donor and government levels), with equal decision-making powers to ensure more effective and efficient use of resources and accountability mechanisms established to monitor the disbursement of funds

- Promote consortium approaches to funding and implementing reintegration programming across government, donor, UN, I/NGO and local civil society, bringing together multiple actors with a range of skills to make reintegration more effective