Papers presented at the International Conference on Children and Youth affected by Armed Conflict: Where to go from here?

Kampala, 25th–27th September 2013
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INTRODUCTION

The papers in this publication have been presented at the International Conference “Children and Youth Affected by Armed Conflict: Where to go from here?”, taking place in Kampala – Uganda, from 25th till 27th of September 2013.

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Enjoy reading!

With best wishes,

The Organising Committee,
Centre for Children in Vulnerable Situations
War Child Holland
Rehabilitation and Reintegration in View of a War Affected Child: Reality on the Ground

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ABSTRACT

For over twenty years, northern Uganda experienced an unprecedented civil strive, during which the Lord's Resistance Army abducted an estimated twenty thousand children into their ranks. Many approaches to ensure children affected by this conflict are reintegrated formed part of the humanitarian and development aid assistance by numerous agencies working in this region. Six to seven years after the conflict, not so many agencies are still engaged in providing rehabilitation, reintegration and psychosocial support to children affected by armed conflict or war while many are investing in development projects. The effects of war on these children in terms of their psychological effects remains a key determinate of what would otherwise be the outcome of the projects that they are engaged in. This is an area that should not be left out as priorities move towards reconstruction and development. A child led research conducted by the War Child Consortium in Uganda, indicated that over 78% of children interviewed in eight districts of northern Uganda said they did not feel safe in their schools, community and at home. While so many organizations are engaged in ensuring children are protected and are safe, what then would be the cause for such alarming interpretations by children themselves? This remains a key question that has to be answered. Are children being meaningfully involved to diverse means of ensuring their protection and safety? Where the effects of the war duly dealt with to eliminate any form of post traumatic stress disorders? What is not being done right? What place does advocacy have in such situations? This remains a key question to both policy makers and practitioners.

Keywords: DEALS, Child Mothers, Stigmatisation, Discrimination, Exclusion

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BACKGROUND

The article talks about Rehabilitation and Reintegration in View of a War Affected Child: Reality on the Ground.

In the past 20 years, war between the Uganda Peoples’ Defences Forces (UPDF) and the Lords Resistant Army (LRA), a militia consisting mainly of child soldiers were abducting children and youth during night time raids in Acholi and Lango regions. This brutal civil war that was waged in Northern Uganda by the Lord’s resistance Army claimed many lives and caused social imbalance in many of its victims (Sima, A., et al., 2012).

The conflict made many people from various villages to resettle in camps for the purpose of safety. In the camps the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) were cramped in huts built barely a meter away from each other leading to congestion, appalling health and sanitation conditions. See pictures below:

![Picture 1](Former IDP in Abia Camp Alebtong District (April 2004))  ![Picture 2](Former IDP in Aloi Alebtong District (2001))

**How the Northern Uganda War resulted into stigmatisation, discrimination and exclusion**

When in the bush, the abducted girls were often forced into sexual servitude, becoming the ‘wives’ of senior LRA commanders. “Girl children were offered as ‘rewards’ to senior officers,” and “The result is that a significant number of returnees were child mothers.” 30% are estimated to have had children as a result of their ordeal (Allen, T., 2005).

Because of the experience that the children and youth in war torn northern Uganda faced, they were stigmatised, discriminated and excluded when they escape and get back to their respective homes. This was because the abducted children did not sit back to face hardships and for that
matter, there are some children who managed to get back to their ancestral homes. Even when abductees eventually return home, their problems are not completely over.

After the formally abducted girl child have returned home, they find themselves dejected, stigmatized and rejected – often by their immediate family that is the mother, father, sisters and brothers; and the entire community. Their chances of re-marrying are small and many abandon their babies. For a long time, these young girls lived with the fear that their so-called ‘husband’ would return to claim them (Q&A on Joseph Kony, 2012).

The rejection by family and society has great economic and social impacts on the lives of these marginalised girls. Of great concern are young mothers who bore children in the process of LRA fighting; they face severe discrimination and often their children are nicknamed ‘the child of the enemy’, ‘killers’ and all sorts of names. This is worst when the child who is born of the young mother is a male, the family members look at this male child as a potential threat to the family assets in future such as family land. This has made the young mothers to indirectly indiscriminate against their own children, creating a chain of discrimination across generations (Akello,G., Richters, A. And Reis, R.,).

Young girls abducted by the LRA rebels and having been abused sexually, some contracted HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. It’s reported that 9 out of 10 girls who leave the LRA are diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or HIV. The widespread fear of HIV/AIDS also contributes to the stigmatisation of formerly abducted girls and their children. Girls in particular face severe consequences as a result of stigma and social exclusion (Kalla,K. & Dixon, P., 2010).

Young girls who have come back from captivity have missed out of formal education, they have no skills to get or create jobs, making it difficult for them to support themselves and their children (Akello, Richters & Reis).

During the conflict, children and young people suffered heavily from violence, insecurity, and displacement. They lost their parents, had to leave their homes, lived in fear for years, and were unable to access education (Ibid).

Young mothers who returned are looked at by their parents, the community and peers as social outcasts and in most cases they are not allowed to interact with the young girls in the community because of the fear that these young girls would negatively impact on the life of others.
Traditional approach in addressing stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion

Mato oput

The Mato Oput Proceeds in three phases, the cleansing ceremony (breaking the egg) then a brief purification rite of spitting in a sheep’s mouth and then the actual reconciliation rite of Mato Oput. (Rev. Fr Joseph, 2005)

Unless a traditional ritual is performed ‘mato oput’ and ‘nyono tong Gweno’ culturally, the formerly abducted are looked at as not clean thus for complete acceptance, there were communal cultural performances that would be performed and that in the shortest period of time would help in the healing process thus complete acceptance of the formerly abducted (Rev. Fr Joseph, 2005).

These children are now adolescents and young adults. Fortunately, almost all of them have moved back to their villages, looking for a way to support themselves and their families. However, the effects of the conflict are far reaching, leaving almost an entire generation of young people under-educated and under-skilled and many communities without the ability to protect their children. In addition, while the rehabilitation of schools and facilities has started, the quality of education is often poor thus resulting in children and young dropping out or not registering at all (Rev. Fr Joseph, 2005).

In a bid to deal with the processes of stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion; War Child Holland has enabled children and young people to claim their right to quality education, live in a safe and conducive environment through non-formal education, vocational education and formal primary education and we invest through innovative approaches to improve child learning.

Note that, the conflict which lasted for over 20 years would be interpreted as a loss to an entire generation, to War child Holland. This is currently stereotyped in the way this current generation share life scenarios which is full of violence and low self-esteem. This prompted an intervention by War Child Holland to address stigmatisation, discrimination and exclusion of children affected by war.

A child led research conducted by the War Child Consortium in Uganda, indicated that over 78% of Children interviewed in eight districts of Northern Uganda said they did not feel safe in their schools, community and at home. This remains a key question that has to be answered. Are children being meaningfully involved to diverse means of ensuring their protection and safety? Where the effects of the war duly dealt with to eliminate any form of post-traumatic stress disorders? What is not
being done right? What place does advocacy have in such situations? This remains a key question to both Policy makers and practitioners.

“To War Child Holland, this conflict that had been for over eighteen years would mean that the entire generation will be lost, and with children who only know the effects of violence.” “Unless more is done, a second generation will also be lost.”

*Rehabilitation and Reintegration in View of a War Affected Child: Reality on the Ground an approach by War Child Holland approach*

War Child Holland is a Non-Government Organisation that entered into Northern Uganda in 2004 at a period when the insurgency was at its peak. In a bid to resolve the problem of stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion of children that are faced with war, War Child Holland is continuing to empower children and young people to shape their own future. WCH believe that children and young people can use their inner strength to create new opportunities, ideas, and initiatives. They are the ones who can realise their rights and change the future. Not only for themselves, but also for their peers, caregivers and communities.

*Strategic approach used by War Child in addressing stigmatization, discrimination and Exclusion of War Affected children in Northern Uganda*

In her approach to deal with stigmatization, Discriminations and Exclusion, War Child uses three integrated programming themes: and these are;

1. **Psychosocial support**
2. **Education and**
3. **Child protection**

**Psychosocial Support**

In war, a child's life changes abruptly. Children and young people witness or even actively participate in violence, most of the time against their will. During armed conflict many children and young people live in IDP (Internally Displaced Person) or refugee camps, experience the loss of relatives, and lack structure and daily activities. As a result they can become anxious, depressed and withdrawn, or rebellious and aggressive. In order to overcome these effects, War Child provides these children and youth with psychosocial support. And this is through the psychosocial approach known as *The DEALS* which is a *creative life skills course for children 11 -15 years old and youth 16-22 years*. It improves the skills of children and youth to better deal with the challenges of everyday life in conflict-affected areas.
The DEALS consist of comprehensive theme-based psychosocial interventions designed to build the resilience of children and young people. Parents and caregivers can also simultaneously follow their own course through a similar intervention. The DEALS combine creative activities and games with group discussions and home assignments. In the long run, they learn how to express their emotions, communicate and confront difficult situations, and build relationships with peers, family members and other adults. PARENTS AND TEACHERS DEAL help parents, caregivers and teachers build skills to provide children and young people with appropriate and effective care and psychosocial support.

Example of the DEAL lay out of the manual for Young Mothers that helps to eliminate Stigmatization, Discrimination and Exclusion of children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEAL</th>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Issues</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>She DEAL</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>12-20</td>
<td>1. Identity and Assessment:</td>
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<td>4. Relations with adults</td>
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<td>6. Future</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Other coping strategies to stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion

Resilience and strength

In War Child’s psychosocial support projects, children and young people build on their resilience and strength. With the right support most children will be able to cope with the adversities they experience.

Through recreational activities and creative life skills courses, children and young people regain their self-confidence and their trust in others. They learn to recognise and deal with their emotions, and cope with the challenges of living in a conflict-affected area. War Child supports parents and caregivers fulfil their obligations to provide care and psychosocial support to their children.

We build the skills of professionals, civil society organisations and government authorities, and work together with them to establish effective support structures and services. We promote legislation and policies concerning children’s rights to healthy psychosocial development.
Education

Non-formal education

Children and young people can still receive a basic education when school is inaccessible. We provide non-formal schooling support to children who are denied access to formal education. For example, literacy and numeracy classes or catch-up education for those who missed out on school because of the conflict. The objective of these approaches is to enable children and young people to receive a basic education when entry or retention in formal school is denied because of war.

Technical and vocational education and training

Through technical and vocational education and training, we support young people (15 years and older) who have limited options as a result of armed conflict and lack a good education. They are also typically those who have the fewest options available to them, such as former child soldiers or girls who experienced abuse. Through concentrated skills training such as welding, carpentry or tailoring, combined with business skills training, savings and loans skills and job coaching, they learn to generate an income and make a meaningful contribution to the society they live in thus making them to forget of their painful past and be focused into a future.

Formal primary education

Formal or Government schools in our project countries are often situated in challenging locations. They can contain a large number of children affected by armed conflict. Our approach meets learners’ needs (children, young people and adults) by facilitating and promoting culturally sensitive learning experiences.

Innovation through ICT

ICT helps improve the quality and accessibility of education on many different levels. We invest in innovation through ICT to find new and effective solutions to support learning of children and young people affected by armed conflict. This includes providing teachers in remote locations with new multimedia education material that can be accessed through tablets, and a computer game-based approach to achieving curriculum goals for out-of-school children.

In addition, in order to deal away with stigmatisation, discrimination and exclusion of war affected children in Northern Uganda especially those who cannot read, write and do simple arithmetic, WCH has given them and still continuing to give them the opportunity to move on with life just as any citizen of the country. The ones who never got the chance to study or continue with their education when they were children, WCH has introduced to the them the Approached called REFLECT. This
mainly to the youth who missed out on learning when they were children at the time of war, they are given the opportunity through the project of Building Skills Changing Futures (BSCF II) which is Project supported by the European Commission and implemented by war Child Holland together with five partners on how to read, write and do simple arithmetic. Thus in the long run, they are able to read, write and can do simple arithmetic which has helped them to fit in their communities. This has enhanced their capacity to access employment through non formal education, life skills and vocational training as well.

**ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED**

Much as the war has ended the impact has yet continued to manifest itself in a different perspective which is as bad as the time when there were very many formerly abducted. Currently, the biggest issue is that there are very many young girls who are getting into motherhood before their time of parenting has reached. There are mothers who are as young as 12 years but already mothering a child. All these are coming up because parents have very limited time for their children and since majority are not educated enough and they are currently looking at their girl children as the only source of income.

**CONCLUSION**

While so many organizations are engaged in ensuring children are protected and are safe, there is need to ensure that continued international funding is strengthened, to fully finance the rehabilitation programmes. One way to look for support for international aid is to continuously highlight the problems facing girls in conflict affected areas of northern Uganda. Specific financing should be pledged for rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for formerly abducted girls. Emphasis should be put on rehabilitation programmes for girls with special provisions for former abductees. As villages and households affected by the LRA war make efforts to rebuild their lives, it is important to recognise that the process of healing from trauma is vital in post-war recovery.
REFERENCES


Patience, G. N. (2013); Women and Girls Right: The Battle of Formerly Abducted girls in Northern Uganda


ABSTRACT

The study addresses the use of storytelling as a vehicle for the transformative learning of peace education aimed at promoting reconciliation and intercultural dialogue between children of Thai-Buddhists and Malay-Muslims in Southern Thailand. Seneci (2002) argues that storytelling is an instrument for socialisation and education that is the key to conflict resolution and peace building, to motivate people to undergo a self-transformation. Through interviews and focus group as well as art workshops with children of the conflicting parties, this case study demonstrates that peace education through storytelling can raise critical awareness about the system of government oppression and encourages intercultural dialogue with a child from the other group as a form of truth-telling contributing to the development of cultures of peace. Storytelling is, therefore, an apparatus for conflict transformation and an act of art leading toward social change through nonviolent means.

Keywords: storytelling, peace education, reconciliation, intercultural dialogue, Southern Thailand

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INTRODUCTION

“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed.” (UNESCO Constitution, 1945)

One of the most devastating legacies of the ongoing intra-state ethno-religious conflict in Southern Thailand is polarised social relationships between Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim communities at the grassroots level. In reality, physical violence is still present at lower levels of this society and continues to be an instrument of revenge in certain areas - where the conflicting parties remain hostile (Anjarwati, 2008). The strong ethno-religious consciousness has been passed down to children and they never view the "other" as anything but an enemy (Anjarwati, 2010).

Using a lens of prescriptive conflict transformation emphasising conflict analysis (Lederach, 1999), it appears that three elements have contributed to its apparent intractable conflict in Southern Thailand:

The first aspect relates to ideas around the glorious past and historical grievances of the Pattani Darussalam Kingdom that was incorporated into Siam, the old name for Thailand, in 1906. With political power subsequently held by the Thai State, native Malay Muslims were increasingly oppressed and discriminated against. The implementation of such an assimilation policy, impacted on key areas - language, religion and formal education system - where Thai is the only official language used in schools. Such programmes may be understood as instances of structural and cultural violence by children of the Malay-Muslims and seem to have contributed to prejudice between the conflicting parties (Anjarwati, 2008).

Burn and Aspeslagh (Burns & Aspeslagh, 1996) define structural violence as "where a group of people are systematically prevented from meeting their basic needs and/or developing their full potential or more explicitly as social injustice.” Moreover, Galtung (Galtung, 1996b) defines cultural violence as "any aspect of culture such as language, religion, ideology, arts, or cosmology that is used to legitimise direct or structural violence”.

The second aspect concerns Malay-Muslim insurgent groups that have been fighting the Thai government by politicising the issue of "Jihad". This term is used to appeal to and indoctrinate Malay-Muslims, especially youth, to fight against the Thai government, which is accused oppressing Islam. Supporters are encouraged to take back the ‘holy land’ of Pattani Darussalam from its occupation by the Thai state, known as “Kafir” (2008). The word “Kafir” from the Qur’an means rejecter of the faith that conceals the ultimate truth about oneness of God (The Islamic Qur’an).
The third aspect relates between the conflict and differing standards of socio-political and economic development in Southern Thailand. There have been massive development strategies developed by Thai government towards states dominated by Thai-Buddhists majority, which are most likely located in the north of the country, whereas the Malay-Muslims in Southern Thailand face poverty, unemployment, and lack of educational opportunities, substandard infrastructure, inadequate supplies of land and capital, and low living standards. This gap creates social jealousy and the feeling of hatred toward minority Thai-Buddhists living in Southern Thailand (2008).

The trauma experienced both by individuals and by their communities is one of the most serious legacies of a civil war (Ghobarah, Huth, & Russett, 2004). Reconciliation between children of the conflicting parties is crucial to overcoming children’s pain living with trauma, fear and intense prejudice against and distrust of the other (Anjarwati, 2010).

One approach to transforming intra-state ethno-religious conflict constructively is to focus on commonalities between the conflicting parties for re-conceptualising identities that promote reconciliation and cultural diversity (Anjarwati, 2010). As storytelling is part of both the conflicting parties’ narratives, it is therefore used as a community-level mechanism to help deconstruct identities that are fuelling the conflict, restore social relationships and raise awareness about the system of government oppression. This objective requires an innovative and creative pedagogy in peace education to use storytelling as a medium for transformative learning contributing to promoting intercultural dialogue and the development of cultures of peace. To rethink peace that enables people of what Illich says to “blossom in their own, unique ways” (Dietrich & Sutzl, 1997, 2006).

This participatory action research case study first provides the research aim and questions followed by a literature review on the use of storytelling within the framework of conflict transformation and its relation to peace education pedagogy aimed to promote reconciliation and intercultural dialogue in an ethnic divided society. The study then utilised findings gathered from the field to share experiences of the use of storytelling to tell their “narrative truth” in a public space to help children of Thai-Buddhists and Malay-Muslims dealing with trauma and negative feelings that is seen as a transformative learning of informal peace education in Southern Thailand.

BACKGROUND
This paper synthesises my field research conducted in 2008 and from 2009 to 2010 in three southernmost provinces of Thailand – Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat – affected by armed conflict. The study was conducted in collaboration with Institute of Asian Studies (IAS), Chulalongkorn
University, Thailand and Nong Chik Hospital, Pattani, Southern Thailand. Contact and communication had been built up since 2008 between the researcher and the Nong-Chik Hospital which had a collaborative project with the Women’s Voices Group conducting peace building program for children from Yala and Pattani provinces of Southern Thailand. There were at least 25 children of the both conflicting parties attended that program that was held once every two months.

One of the vehicles used by the Nong Chik Hospital to deal with children’s healing was storytelling. In this sense, storytelling is seen a medium of truth-telling for transformative learning process of informal peace education worked within the framework of conflict transformation for social change through nonviolent means. Storytelling was conducted thrice during my six months period of field research in Southern Thailand.

As a foreign researcher speaking Malay-Muslim language and knowing some words in Thai-Buddhist, I was acted as facilitator of the focus group discussion and the arts workshop through storytelling assisted by a representative of Nong-Chik hospital to help children of the conflicting parties sharing their own narrative truths that can give a traumatised child a range of options for expressing and working through both conscious and repressed thoughts and feelings. The use of storytelling combined with the arts workshop can bring children to begin intercultural dialogue leading toward the development of cultures of peace and social reconciliation for long-term peace building efforts in Southern Thailand.

RESEARCH AIM

This study aims to examine how narratives can be used as a medium for transformative learning process of peace education to encourage social reconciliation and intercultural dialogue among children from different groups that have been taken apart by an intractable conflict and to contribute to long-term peace building efforts in Southern Thailand.

To achieve this main aim, the study emphasised the process of telling stories as a form of narrative truth practiced by children of Thai-Buddhists and Malay-Muslims in a public space leading toward a dialogical truth as a means for nonviolent social change.

The focus of study should be viewed as a strategy for promoting community-level mechanism to deal with conflict transformation and prevention reflecting peace education values: raise awareness about the system of government oppression, promote reconciliation and intercultural dialogue that can contribute to the development of cultures of peace in Southern Thailand. According to UNICEF (1999) encouraging the use of interactive, cooperative and participatory methods is a priority in the promotion of transformative learning aimed to relate the knowledge, and skills of peace education as well as to change attitudes, perceptions and behaviour.
towards “the other” which promote critical empowerment for social transformation that are conducive to peace (UNICEF, 1999).

LITERATURE REVIEW
The review of the literature here falls into the following three categories: reconciliation and conflict transformation, storytelling as a medium for truth-telling, and storytelling as peace pedagogy for intercultural dialogue.

Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation
According to Lederach (2003) relationships play a central role in conflict transformation. As such it is relevant to focus on the relational and cultural dimensions of conflict: (i) the cultural dimension relates to how culture influences the response mechanisms that are put in place to address conflict, (ii) the relational dimension refers to the patterns of communication and interaction that affect relationships to increase mutual understanding between conflicting parties and transform the conflict. Further, Miall (2004) and Shapiro (2006), emphasise the importance of cultural context of a dispute; to modifying perceptions of the opposing party and repairing broken relationships enabling mutual acceptance for conflict transformation and social reconciliation.

In the view of Negowetti (2003), the concept of reconciliation involves identifying the events that have occurred (truth), striving to repair the wrongdoings (justice), and forgiving those who have done harm (mercy). In a similar vein, Fisher (2004) also suggests that reconciliation must be built on objectives of renewing social relations, fostering dialogue, and building confidence. The experiences of both victims and perpetrators engaged in dialogue can encourage transformation to occur.

Effective tools for reconciliation that may include sharing stories, venting feelings, and using the arts to represent violent experiences (Krippner & McIntyre, 2003). These tools may be used to engage both victims and perpetrators in a dialogue, in which both have an opportunity to meet one another by sharing stories, expressing feelings, apologising and, hopefully, forgiving (2003).

To be meaningful, such dialogue has to proceed in a spirit of reciprocity, mutual recognition and it must be infused with cultural broad-mindedness that fosters intercultural and interfaith dialogue to find commonalities and a common good in society. If this dialogue fosters tolerance and mutual understanding as a means for transformative learning in peace education, it may change perceptions, behaviours, and attitudes towards “the other”, especially if it is applied in an ethnic divided society (Anjarwati, 2010).
Storytelling as a Medium for Truth-Telling

According to Senehi (2002) narratives are the rationale behind community thinking. Since cultural narratives encompass the knowledge that is shared by a group, they can be adapted and employed as a tool to create critical thinking and persuade people about aspects of social life. Stories therefore are instruments for both socialisation and education. Fisher (2004) has described the process of truth recovery which is based on narrative truth; storytelling between victims and perpetrators, where personal truths and diverging experiences are communicated to a wider public and dialogical truth arising from the interaction and discussion among the conflicting parties to encourage social reconciliation by raising critical awareness and restore social relationships.

Storytelling can also be seen as a mechanism for the transformation of a culture of violence into a culture of peace, through a process of ‘conscientisation’ (Freire, 1970). According to Paolo Freire (Taylor, 1993), "conscientisation" refers to developing consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality. It happens when a community “voices” its concerns and discover solution to problems by working through conflict and towards coexistence. Such a transformative action demonstrates that a participatory learning process of informal peace education may empower people to break free from a culture of silence. It may also re-awaken or strengthen a latent culture of resistance “to transform people from being the object to the subject of development” (Freire, 1970). When dealing with intense trauma, storytelling has been shown to have important consequences. The opportunity to tell one's story of trauma to someone who is willing to listen can be extremely beneficial, even supporting and bring to the recount of deeply personal stories that have previously been repressed (Chaitin, 2004).

The experience of participating in such a narrative and dialogical truth encourages reflection, empowerment and transformative action in seeking solutions to issues of concern through nonviolent means. This participation represents a powerful catalyst for bringing about reconciliation and intercultural dialogue without judgment regarding other cultures and religious background.

Storytelling as Peace Pedagogy for Intercultural Dialogue

Pedagogy in transforming conflict supports more complete engagement by the participants, which in turn promises deeper reflection, altered attitudes, and changed behaviours (Boulding, 1998). Reardon and Cabezudo argue (2002) that peace pedagogy is participatory and dialogical, using such methods as dyads, cooperative learning projects, discussion groups, brainstorming sessions, problem-solving frameworks, alternative futures exercises, and case studies of peace movements to
foster critical thinking. By raising people’s consciousness about their rights and through exploration of common values and aspirations—it is possible to raise consciousness of people to change their attitudes, behaviour and perceptions towards “others” and negotiate a shared future based on love, respect, and dignity.

Peace education involves skills, including active listening, reflection, problem-solving, cooperation and conflict resolution. The process involves empowering people with skills, attitudes, and knowledge to create a safe world and to build a sustainable environment (Harris & Morrison, 2003). Further, Glaserfeld (Matiru, Mwangi, & Schlette, 1995) discusses methods of teaching peace education emphasising a “bottom-up” and participatory approach through creating a space for encounter, exchange and critical discussion that constitutes “rule governed interaction”. Such interaction must, however, contain an element of dialogue, reflection and evaluation. The aim is to cultivate transformative agency, which is “a process of being freed from the oppression of being illiterate, a means of gaining knowledge and skills, as well as a process of critical self-reflection and empowerment” (Cranton, 1994). Such processes encourage reflection on how we understand ourselves and about how we perceive our relationship to “others” (Mezirow, 1991).

Therefore, principles of learning in Peace and Conflict Transformation theory follow Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed emphasising: (i) the concept of conscientisation is the centred that explains the process of building awareness of self-in-context that produces individual growth and social change, (ii) is a process of mutuality where facilitator and participant or teacher and student discover and learn together through reflection and action, which are kept in direct relationship as the root of learning and transformation, (iii) people and their daily understanding are key resources, (iv) from the perspective of training, people are resources not recipients, (v) posing problems related to real-life situations and challenges rather than providing prescriptions about those situations. Such transformative learning process stimulates reflection and participatory process aimed to create a process that is consistent with the outcome goals of empowerment and transformative action that validates the knowledge and resources of local people (Freire, 1970; Lederach, 1997).

In regions of intractable conflict, such as the case of Southern Thailand - the purpose of peace education itself is to change mindsets of people through peaceful means to promote understanding, respect and tolerance (Salomon, 2002a). To change mindsets of people, cultural activities has been one of the main ways to engage with peace education (Kester, 2008). The artistic and cultural dimensions of conflict transformation expressed in popular culture and the arts, such as through storytelling, theatre, dance, film, magazines, puppetry, and local radio, etc (UNICEF, 1999) provide a creative expressive area of human activity contributed to a powerful source of peace
building efforts. These cultural dimensions used by a social group to perceive “others”, communicate their needs, express feelings and hopes as well as find solution to resolve problems. The arts offer new lens through which to interpret conflicts (Shank & Schirch, 2008). They offer opportunity for empowerment for local people to discuss and resolve the problems and for nonviolent resistance.

Therefore, the practice of peace storytelling may be utilised as a technique for eliciting transformative action and envisioning peaceful futures this could help to raise problems, identify solutions and potentially heal traumas.

Peace education through storytelling also reflects the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence that promotes intercultural dialogue. Gandhi counsels that every culture can and should learn from others because there is truth in every culture but none represents the “absolute truth”. He encourages acculturation to foster pluralism through dialogue to understand “others” in a spirit of solidarity (Merton, 1965).

The Gandhian conception of “enlarged pluralism” encompasses the fostering of togetherness, tolerance and solidarity among cultures and traditions through nonviolent means that promotes an attitude of open-mindedness, and an effort to know, understand and learn from others (1965). Tolerance leads towards his concept of intercultural dialogue based on values of “truth” (satya) and “nonviolence” (ahimsa) which is not merely words, ideas or theories but rather the practice of active listening. It is due to dialogue without listening and leaning is merely a discussion (1965).

It is suggested that the Gandhian nonviolent to intercultural dialogue is a way of bridging difference and developing intercultural awareness and mutual understanding to be able to understand not only other cultures, but also to bring different cultures together and find a “common good” through dialogue and social interaction with “others” (1965). Peace storytelling therefore can contribute to building a culture of peace based on cultural diversity and respects on the incompatible vision of peace for social change.

Through storytelling - the value of a dialogical process is realised and to take it a step beyond oral exchange when stories can be used as a form of truth-telling for transformative learning of peace education leading towards intercultural dialogue and social reconciliation to create cultures of peace (Anjarwati, 2010).

The declaration states that “A Culture of Peace is a set of values, attitudes, traditions, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reflect and inspire: (i) respect for life and for all human rights, (ii)
rejection of violence in all its forms and commitment to the, (iii) prevention of violent conflict by tackling their root causes through dialogue and negotiation, (iv) commitment to full participation in the process of equitably meeting the needs of present and future generations, (v) promotion of the equal rights and opportunities of women and men, (vi) recognition of the right of everyone to freedom of expression, opinion, and information, (vii) devotion to principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding between nations, between ethnic, religious, cultural and other groups, and individuals (SIPRI-UNESCO, 1998).

RESEARCH METHOD
The theoretical framework underpinning the study is elicitive conflict transformation emphasising a participatory process and a “bottom-up” approach (Lederach, 1997) rooted in the local culture of the conflicting parties. As a qualitative case study it designed through activity addressing the interpretative techniques that attempt clarify the meaning of naturally occurring phenomena – Thai-Buddhist and Malay-Muslim children through storytelling within the society of Southern Thailand where the majority of the population are Muslim.

Storytelling was conducted at Nong-Chik hospital with 6 children of the both conflicting parties through Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Two forms of data collection were used. The first was the notes made by the researcher who acted as a facilitator during the storytelling session and documented the events. The second was an audio-recorded, semi-structured in-depth group interview conducted by the researcher following the session of sharing their narrative truths. The aim of conducting interviews was to get their deeper feedback about what was happening inside them during the process.

Their answers and testimonies provided valuable pointers to issues in regards to the social awareness and social interaction amongst the participants during and after that session. The research design uses open-ended questions. Interview schedules were prepared for interviews and focus group discussions with Thai-Buddhists and Malay-Muslims children aged 7 to 12 years old. Children in this age range were selected because this phase is one of critical developmental for children shaping their own identity and their perceptions of “the other” as an individual person as well as part of their community.
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION
This section of the paper concerns the experiences of the researcher with peace storytelling as a means for transformative learning of peace education for intercultural dialogue among children of Malay-Muslims and Thai-Buddhists in Southern Thailand. One young Malay-Muslim girl shared her story that focussed on her social and political experiences during the conflict. Through her story, she “voiced” the reality of her experience living in a conflict zone and as one of the victims of intra-state ethno-religious conflict.

A Case Study of Peace Education through Storytelling for Intercultural Dialogue in Southern Thailand
The storyteller was the daughter of one Krue Se Mosque’s victims that happened in 2004. Her testimony provides an example about how storytelling works to deal with the traditional culture of the both communities. While this Malay-Muslim child expressed her negative inner feelings, the Thai-Buddhist children undertook active listening of her narrative truth as a means for transformative learning that encouraged dialogical truth.

The Moslems has been accused of terrorism. The storyteller’s father did not die directly at the time but his activities after that were always watched by the military until he was eventually shot at home in 2008.

After telling that story and sharing her grief, she also mentioned feelings of guilt and depression because she felt she had done nothing to protect her father’s life.

“I want to help people because after the humanitarian disaster in 2004, about 2000 people dead. Presently, I want to help the women and children who have the same horrible experiences as I do. It is because most of the victims of the ongoing conflict are men and when they die, they leave behind their wives and children. So this is our responsibility to help them out of these distressful events. We do what we can do although I am just a young girl but I really want to help the government to find a solution to resolve this ongoing conflict. And as a young person, I truly want to learn about the cultural differences between us and the Thai-Buddhist. So, I really hope that we can be united again like before, because when everyone is united, hopefully we can find a solution to stop the conflict.” (ibid, 2010)

This 12-year-old girl who had witnessed her father being killed was withdrawn and depressed when she first joined the workshop group for healing facilitated by Nong Chick hospital. She was experiencing worries, regrets and repressed feelings linked to accumulated unfinished business with her father when she was unable to protect him.
During the focus group, the girl detailed the different components she had experienced in that healing process. She explained how liberated she felt of working with kind of approach and that art also made her focus on healing her negative feelings, such as anger, guilty and disappointment.

“To me, it was such a new experience and it was hard but helped me forget about my problems. When I was drawing the picture, it helped me create some distance between my physical and emotional aspects. Then the relief came from the fact that I had to work through the pain and express it to feel more alive.” (Ibid, 2010)

The narrative truth helped her through the complex process of remembering and forgetting. It raised a lot of mixed emotions for her, because it was difficult sharing the terrible experience that she drew in her picture. It was a very confronting process for her, but she was able to finish her storytelling session and she said that after the suffering and sorrow, she actually felt good.

“Peace and tranquillity produced by the purity of our mind. Every human being has love, unity, charity and understanding for each other. Human live together though diverse nationality, religion, country or various language backgrounds, so they should appreciate each other’s differences to live in harmony, in happiness and in a peaceful way. This picture as you can see is my hope for peace in my land. When people have love for and understand each other, then the feelings of prejudice, jealousy and hatred will never exist anymore in our society” (ibid, 2010).

Drawing allowed her to move beyond those negative feelings and the transformative process produced positive results: the girl reported that she felt more alive, more hopeful,
encouraged, and tougher, having moved away from feeling pity for herself, feeling proud and empowered because she did something for herself. She also explained that she can talk about her past freely and that she no longer cries when she evokes it.

“My story tells that I am a victim of the ongoing conflict in my own land, but a victim not being sorry for myself. I am a victim who is now fighting for my rights and I will never give up! I can see my bright future after all of this; my anger, my frustration and the feeling of my regret. I want to forget it because I feel proud of myself now. I feel more confident since I was able to express my negative inner feelings in a right way and I feel transformed to become a better human being from now on.” (Ibid, 2010)

This experience helped her to recognise the reality of what had happened and to let go of her negative feelings of guilt and this can be a powerful way of helping her to cope with loss, when it is sudden and violent. This experience also suggests that drawing and painting images can be helpful in coping with loss, especially for children. In the workshop, when a group member related an experience, almost everybody in the room felt it as well. Therefore, the storyteller experiences acceptance, understanding, and support, which transforms the experience she carries into the future.

Adler (1982) argues that newly forming identity does not belong to a single culture, but part of a multicultural society addressing our social awareness about “the other”. This means that the original cultural identity begins to lose its distinctiveness and rigidity and the emergent identity shows an increasing “interculturalness” in terms of social interaction and communication across culture.

Therefore, the power of the storytelling process as a form of conflict transformation lies with the active listening on the part of the Thai-Buddhist children. The understanding of both communities, initiated by their children may open windows in the future for individuals and groups to reconcile. Another important and also quite unique dimension of doing this healing is the collective dynamic that developed. The child survivors supported each other during the focus group and art workshop; this bonding gave them hope and courage to fight for their rights and stand for their dignity as human beings. I often find it helpful to use the method of storytelling combined with art, such as painting or drawing because it can encourage and help the participants to express their inner negative feelings and imagine the lost person, which in this case was the girl’s father.

An essential element in the healing process is to uphold the dignity of people. For those coming in from outside, this implies respecting the local culture and traditions, and being a respectful witness to the stories people have to tell and the emotions they express. The experience of the healing
process through storytelling in Southern Thailand may assist the victims and their community to understand the root causes of conflict in new ways and to develop strategies of living together in a more peaceful environment.

As such, the focus group and the art workshop can be understood are not only a collection of individual pieces of art but also a collective art work and peace story told as a whole. Those who participated in these activities strongly stressed the importance for them of portraying a collective experience. Thus, storytelling as a form of art serves as a medium of transformative learning to symbolically reconnect individual experiences and stories to others. This illustrates an additional key role that art may play in constructing narratives to the conflicting parties.

The current oppression and political violence in Southern Thailand directly attacks the basis on which individuals relate to each other - trust, beliefs and spaces. If people can come together, sharing their narrative truth and strengthening each other, they may transform a culture of violence into a culture of peace. The terrible experiences of the storyteller provide an illustration of a powerful spiritual journey of self-discovery.

The use of peace storytelling as a form of truth-telling re-connects the individual and community dimensions of violence, allowing the process of forgiveness and social reconciliation to unfold overtime. The storytelling process includes active listening, that enables the group not only to hear the story but also the pain within it to undergo transformation process transforming a culture of violence into a culture of peace.

Healing through storytelling helps individuals and communities feel safe and confident and provide them with a sense of hope beyond the violence they have just experienced. Such a dialogical participatory and reflection process is seen as a transformative learning of peace education that allows “the other” to listen deeply and have great respect and empathy for those who are traumatised by the ongoing conflict in Southern Thailand.

Thus, it is argued that the promotion of peace education through storytelling can create a “space” for reflective dialogue in which inter-personal relationships can be restored, and social coexistence promoted, especially amongst children of the conflicting parties. Through the use of storytelling children are given an opportunity to share their lived experiences, affirm each other, and internalise new possibilities to create a culture of peace; it can also help to heal traumas leading to reduce violence and increased social justice in human relationships that have been harmed due to conflict.

Further, storytelling encourages intercultural dialogue that can be interpreted as the child’s desire to proclaim their "unheard" voices and feelings to be shared with “the other” as well as a means for
active listening. Storytelling therefore can be utilised as a medium for transformative learning of peace education and a conflict prevention mechanism contributing to the development of a culture of peace in Southern Thailand (Anjarwati, 2010).

CONCLUSION
The use of storytelling practiced with Southern Thailand’s children from different cultural and religious backgrounds has provided a positive healing experience, especially those traumatised by the ongoing conflict. It offers an opportunity for such children to engage in a participative narrative truth that may lead towards intercultural dialogue that encourages children to build mutual understanding and cooperate together to foster peaceful coexistence.

Creating a “safe” space therefore not only in a physical but, more importantly, an emotional sense, is vital for conflict transformation to occur. Through understanding man-made or natural disasters in an historical context life can be seen as sustainable and individuals can still have hope for a better future.

Participatory dialogue is dynamic; it is an ongoing activity and ever changing. Therefore, that narrative and dialogical truth are self-reflective have its roots in their unique ability to help children think about themselves and about how they perceive their social relationships with “the other”. This unique ability lets children be participant and observer simultaneously so that they can watch, reflect and evaluate themselves to undergo a transformation and later self-empowerment. Time-binding between children from the Malay-Muslim and the Thai-Buddhist communities is therefore revealing of how the characteristics of dialogical participatory and culture are woven together in one moment to increased social justice in human relationships.

This process is seen as a form of transformative actions and reflection to promote social cohesion with “the other” as a means for transformative learning of peace education to contribute to the development of a culture of peace among children from different cultural and religious background and to foster a long-term peace building effort in three Southernmost provinces of Thailand.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


ABSTRACT

Social spaces, specifically family and immediate environ are crucial for the survival, proper growth and development of any child. Social spaces in Lango sub region is part of the focus in an on-going study aimed at developing a theoretical framework for social integration of children born to female ex-combatant by enemy soldiers. The hope is to enlighten processes for policies and practices on CBOW within Uganda and beyond. Part of the in-depth study looks at the behavior at actors within social spaces with respect to internal and external stresses, in this case, the emergence of CBOW. The paper will explore both the elasticity of these social spaces for absorption of CBOW and the pathway(s) for their membership. With practical examples of real life situations in Lango sub region in northern Uganda, the paper explores both the elasticity of these social spaces for absorption of CBOW and the pathway(s) for their membership.

Key words: Integration, Children born of war
INTRODUCTION

Children born to female ex-combatants and fathered by enemy soldiers are a common relic of many African contemporary wars. In Northern Uganda, where according to a Unicef estimates a conservative figure of 66,000 men, women (11.5%) and children (53%) were abducted and conscripted into the rank and file of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) between 1987 and 2006, this is a common enough feature. In addition to serving as combatants, the women and girls were subjected to systematic rape and impregnation resulting in births of children. Jeannie Annan & Moriah Brier (2010), quoting several sources, estimated that at least ¼ of these (11.5% women) were distributed as wives to the rank and file of the LRA and that ½ of these women bore children. Because of the lack of accurate statistics on abduction and return, complicated by other factors such as concealment of identity and by-passing of reception centres, the number of children born however remains contested with many sources hovering somewhere around 2,000 children. Since this study takes an anthropological approach, no speculation on any definite figure has been made.

Many of the surviving children have followed their ex-combatant mothers back into communities in northern Uganda. These CBOGs often joined their mothers’ receptor social groups either as unaccompanied children who were found in the bushes after a battle or, in the majority of cases, they accompanied their mothers upon return to receptor communities. Empirical reports have demonstrated the extreme difficulties these children face upon joining their mothers’ receptor groups. There is evidence of exclusion, abuse and deprivation which is directed at such children on account of their birth circumstances\(^1\). The LRA combatants (both parents) are known to have fostered gross violence, massacres, maiming, abductions and disruption of whole communities they themselves originated from during the war. Symbolization of such a traumatic history was widely and easily directed at these children born of ex-female combatants, spawning claims of stigma and exclusion which are contrary to the basic principles of survival, growth and development of any child. It is possible that, depending on the ex-combatant mother’s background, factors such as coping strategies, poverty and age could vary the extent of stigma and exclusion for her child born

Social reintegration has been a helpful concept in trying to understand the needs of ex-combatants with thousands of children and adults in northern Uganda benefiting from a vast array of initiatives directed at helping them rebuild lives within social groups at various levels. Criticisms of the impact

of such ventures notwithstanding, it can be safely claimed that there has been no explicit attention both in form of policy frameworks and programmes to support the absorption of CBOW into their parental receptor groups.

The Langi of Northern Uganda:
The Langi are one of the groups of indigenous people in Uganda. They are a Luo-speaking group and make up 6% (approx. 1.4 million) of the Ugandan population. At least 81% of the Lango people are concentrated on approx. 12,800 km², an area known as Lango country, located in the most central northern part of Uganda. The rest are diffused throughout Uganda through secondary migration. This study is concerned with the 81% that are still occupying the block designated as Lango land in Northern Uganda.

The constitutional theory of Lango society is founded on patriclans (and the now faded age-set system). Each Lango male had to belong to each of these units where the extent to which he fitted in or manipulated his membership determined his place in the polity. These units were also part of the Lango jural system alongside ‘narrower’ rules which governed each individual.

To be a member of a Lango patriclan, one’s mother had to be married with cattle belonging to that clan. Other individuals such as war captives could also be adopted as bonafide members of the clan. If a man failed to pay cattle, his offspring will belong to the maternal clan of their mother until he is able to fulfill the cattle/bride wealth payment requirement. Where he turned for help to his maternal uncles and they provided cattle, his offspring would belong to his mother’s patriclan. Payment also made it possible for kinsmen who were not clan members to father children who were.

The Lango people have been directly and indirectly targeted by the activities of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) during its 20+ year-old war that started in 1987 and continued till 2006. The effects of abductions, massacres, maiming, lootings and the desecration of entire livelihoods still persist to-date. One key effect has been the systematic rape and impregnation of abducted girls which resulted into births of thousands of children fathered by enemy soldiers of the LRA. These children, embedded among the Langi, are the subject of this study.

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METHODOLOGY

This case study is part of an ongoing study that heavily relies on a mix of anthropological methodologies. Tools of observation and the application of semi structured and unstructured interviews are being relied upon in generating data. Ex-combatants in Northern Uganda were known to have either passed through more than six reception centres or (for the majority) returned straight to their communities without any records. The study worked with the Rachele Rehabilitation Centre (hereinafter- *Rachele*) archival files to identify children of ex-combatants that had passed through the center between 2003 and 2006. Out of the 204 female ex-combatants that hailed from Lango who were hosted at the Rachele Rehabilitation Centre between, 13 of them had 19 children (9 boys & 10 girls) with their LRA captors.

The study deliberately then identified the ex-combatant mothers of these CBOW using detailed archival information availed by *Rachele* whose addresses were used to trace for the children since *Rachele* documentation revealed that all such children left with their mothers when the mothers were being reunited with their families. Tracing of mothers was often difficult and took hours or days because of conflicting names given to the *Rachele* centre. Many abducted girls created new names for themselves while with the LRA. This would reduce the likelihood of the LRA identifying her roots and so stave off punitive acts befalling her and family, for example, upon her escape. In this way, the study located the children and, applying all ethically approved guidelines (including consent forms, anonymization), used the emerging narratives to recruit in a snowballing fashion at least seven circles of relevant participants of immediate social groups around each of the children (N=19), namely:

- Mother/guardian
- Family hosting the child (mother’s parental family usually)
- Mother’s new family
- Mother’s patriclan
- Father’s patriclan
- Child’s school
- Child’s immediate neighborhood & peers -
- Local council, government and CSOs

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* Reception centres were interim holding units that facilitated debriefings, emotional and psychosocial support, tracing and reunification of a returnee with family. World Vision, Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO), Caritas, CPA, Rachele, KICWA were among agencies that ran several of such centres.

* Rachele is now a regular school for vulnerable children offering both Vocational and ‘O-Level’ education since 2010 and is now managed by Caritas – Lira.
The study hoped to understand better the nature of the receptor social groups and identify opportunities that are inherent within such groups for the successful integration of CBOW.

The study uses Max Weber’s social relations concept (interactions)\(^6\) to understand the behavior of many actors within a CBOW receptor group in Lango and how the meanings of such behaviors affect the actions of others within and outside the group to underline vulnerabilities of a CBOW. We believe that understanding such vulnerabilities and how they are propagated can help address issues of integration of CBOW. The study, mapped out among the Lango speaking areas of northern Uganda, worked directly with rings of people around each of the CBOW (N=20) and identified key elements that practitioners and academics might want to consider more closely when dealing with the integration of CBOW. In a way, these also directly affect the reintegration of their ex-combatant mothers. Our study pits the historiography of groups (in this case the Langi) alongside their behaviours. We seek to locate sustainable solutions to address the plight of children fathered by enemy soldiers upon return to their maternal groups.

\(^6\) Max Weber 1978, pp. 26-27
## FINDINGS

### Summary of key findings related to social interactions and their links to vulnerabilities of CBOW

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<tr>
<th>Behaviour of actors</th>
<th>Consequences of action for CBOW</th>
<th>Effects on CBOW</th>
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<td><strong>LRA:</strong></td>
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| - Abduction, systematic rape & impregnation of girls/women | - Birth of CBOW to abducted girls/women out of wedlock  
- Mothers are a shame to the family & a disgrace to herself  
- Permanent reminders of LRA actions | - Low self esteem  
- Emotional & psychological abuse |
| **Mother:**         |                                 |                 |
| - Often leave CBOW behind when she ‘marries’ or elopes with another man | - CBOW cannot follow mother into her new home because they ‘belong to another man’.  
- Question of identity clarified for CBOW  
- Right to parental/lineage benefits (patriclan)  
- Access to both parents | - CBOW stay with maternal families or given away as servants  
- Normal growth and development in own family |
| - Mother may go back to the LRA partner | - Outsiders must not know that s/he is a CBOW  
- Continuity of family/lineage guaranteed  
- ‘... You are part of us’ now  
- ‘... We accept you but will want nothing to remind us about your father and his deeds...’ | - Child will be treated well and offered opportunities in life; inheritance, etc.  
- In this way, the family is embracing the child and inviting him or her to partake of all the privileges and opportunities available to members of the family.  
- Stigma  
- Rejection  
- Given away by mother |
| **Receptor family (mother’s family):** | - Externally influenced ‘conditions’ for acceptance of CBOW difficult to sustain | - Bitterness  
- Confusion  
- Remain at the periphery of receptor group (opportunities, food, clothes, education, etc).  
- isolation |
| - Closetsing of CBOW status  
- May celebrate CBOW when at brink of extinction  
- May give CBOW new name | - CBOW are ‘bad mannered’  
- CBOW were ‘fathered by LRA who were our enemies’  
- They were ‘born outside wedlock’  
- Cannot ‘trust such people’ | |
- A CBOW’s mother may marry, leading to bride wealth which can be passed onto her brother for his own marriage

**Stepfamily:**
- May accept to raise the CBOW
- Demands for customary compensation if CBOW grows live with them

**Maternal patriclan:**
- Levy customary suit of ‘luk’ on CBOW mother’s family if they cannot account for the father (a unique practice seen with the *jo pedi cung kai* in Acaba sub county, Oyam district)
- Levy customary suit of ‘luk’ on father of CBOW – a common practice in all clans of Lango
- Will ask for ‘kwor’ (blood payment) to compensate for a child whose ‘luk’ was not paid yet went and lived and met his/her death in a ‘foreign’ clan – a common practice with all Lango clans and a common enough reason given for mothers in new relationships leaving behind their CBOW

**Peers, neighbourhood, community:**
- Looks down on CBOW as illegitimate
- Abuses, insults and name-calling
- Suspect CBOW mothers of being responsible
- ‘... To atone for the shame the mother brought upon us...’
- ‘... To atone for the trespass he did on our family and the shame it brought upon us...
- To get his acknowledgement that the child is his and his clan’s.
- To give the child the identity of his people through naming.
- A child of an unmarried mother whose ‘luk’ was not paid belongs to his/her maternal patriclan and no decision can be made without approval of the mother’s people as in the case of the *jo Ogwetiang*

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<th>CBOW</th>
<th>Stepfamily</th>
<th>Maternal patriclan</th>
<th>Peers, neighbourhood, community</th>
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- Child will have right to a home and welfare
- Reduction in stigma in the family
- Access to a parent (mother)
- Opportunities to grow and develop in a family environment
- Acceptance by mother’s patriclan as a clan member
- Stigma reduced
- Acceptance by father’s clan
- Opportunity to grow up in father’s homestead
- Opportunity to benefit from resources and opportunities in father’s home
- Safety net for Child
- Stigma
- Further isolation
- Miss out on opportunities within the community
| for crimes in the locality  
- Isolate CBOW  
- Accept membership of mothers to self-help projects only when recommended by a respected family member. | clan whose ex-combatant daughter was married to a man of the jo Omolatar and accepted to raise her CBOW in Agweng sub county in Lira district. |
|---|---|
| Government agencies & NGO:  
- Agents not well trained to manage the delicate situations of CBOW  
- LCs may occasionally hold community meetings when ex-combatant mothers threaten suicide or become too aggressive seen in Iceme sub county for an ex-combatant who threatened to burn down her husband, co-wife and child inside a hut at night  
- CBOW may be supported but partially and always in dire need of basic necessities - a practice by Rachele for some CBOW that passed through their centre |  
- ‘... CBOW 'luk' was not paid...’  
- ‘... His father did not marry his mother...’  
- ‘... S/he has links with the LRA/...reminds us of what the LRA did to us...’  
- ‘He is a bad influence...’  
- ‘... The Amnesty people told us his mother has HIV, so does he ... and he could infect us if we played with him...’  
- ‘... We trust the grandmother of that boy that is why we accepted her mother (Ex-combatant) to join our Village Savings and Loans Association...’  
- Unethical approaches by agents during (re)unification  
- Local leaders not sensitized to support CBOW social needs  
- CBOW needs not a priority |  
- Stigma  
- Isolation by family & community  
- Often not enrolled or drop out of school  
- Inferiority complex  
- Failure to ‘fit’ and belong
These emerging issues stress the following:

1. The behavior of members of the group that hosts a CBOW – whether spoken, by action or inaction – will carry meanings to the group which can trigger a chain of actions or inactions which will affect the child’s continuous stay in the group. These meanings will either render the child vulnerable in varying degrees or ‘arrest’ the state of vulnerability once fulfilled.

2. Vulnerabilities associated with social interactions such as the ones above also tend to trigger socially generated remedies most especially through structured processes as in the case of ‘luk’7, ‘kwor’8 and name – changing. For example, naming was one way of sealing ‘identity’ of a person as seen with the jo Okii cel in okwang sub county when their son had a CBOW with a daughter of the Okarowok Orum of Ogur sub county in Lira. Fulfillment of such social requirements (often a blanket ‘rule’ for everyone) will reduce the level of vulnerability of the child.

3. The fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of ‘meanings’ of social behaviors of receptor groups will have either positive or negative feedback in the life of a child. These will be in the form of psychological consequences where a child becomes aggressive, disrespectful, isolates he/she, feeling of inferiority, bitterness or confusion. It could also be a social consequence where the child is shunned by peers, not enrolled in school, become a servant at a tender age or (positive) have the benefit of a safety net from the mother’s patriclan.

4. Identity issues underpin most of the social vulnerability concerns around the CBOW because with it comes the opportunities for the child to lay claims to certain privileges and make demands on a group.

5. To understand issues of identity for the CBOW, there is need to identify experiences of the receptor community and relate them to the CBOW needs and experiences. Findings among groups in Lango indicate that child’s experiences are determined by the behavior (and meanings) of the receptor community. For example, when the group deems that its established norms are not being fulfilled, yet there is open access to its resources (land, food, social assets, and water), there is a social backlash on the CBOW. The lack of fulfillment of such ‘norms’ will translate into a vulnerability for the CBOW. (Yet where as the child is some kind of a ‘stress’ or ‘shock’ to the group, the group’s norms also can be a ‘stressor’ to the CBOW).

6. But ‘stressor factors of a CBOW can also be encouraged by stimulants carelessly introduced by actors at the point of entry of the CBOW such as unethical conducts by CSOs or government agencies. E.g. declaration of HIV status to receptor community during entry of ex-combatant mother of the Jo Pedi Cung Kal clan in Acaba sub county, Oyam district led to severe stigma on the mother and child.

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7 ‘Luk’ is the customary suit levied against a man who fathers a child (or is got in a sexual act) with an unmarried woman among the Lango people (field interview notes April, July 2013)

8 ‘Kwor’ is the blood feud demanded of a perpetuator of a murder and his people – can be in form of cattle. Failure would lead to vengeance by the offended side (field interview notes, April, July 2013)
7. Practitioners interested in the case of integrating a CBOW will therefore have to first understand the child’s needs vis-à-vis those of its perceived receptor social group (mothers, family, lineage, clan, peers, etc.). This would enable actors generate opportunities that are tailored to the child’s needs and can work for both child and group sustainably.

RECOMMENDATION & CONCLUSION

Our findings among the Lango people of Northern Uganda have led us to make suggestions for integrating CBOW as outlined below.

*Lango/Luo model for integrating CBOW:* Lango experience reveals that every CBOW has unique integration issues and that social groups associated with them - from family to lineage to clan levels to peer etc. – can never have similar experiences, attributes or resources. Our findings of social interactions within receptor groups among communities in Lango and how they influence vulnerabilities enabled us to suggest the following steps in managing cases of CBOW successfully:

**Step 1: Understanding behavior of social group (receptor)**
- Identify receptor family demands, expectations & actions
- Understand peers & community expectations & demands
- Understand coping routes
- Identify both internal & external actors & their activities

**Step 2: Understanding the potential consequences of the behavior on the**
- Identify meanings underpinning behavior of actors linked to the receptor group
- *(Identity, external influences, interpersonal traits, resource access & usage, power dynamics)*
- Identify & understand the tools for fulfillment of meanings
- Understand benefits to CBOW

**Step 3: Understanding the effects of the meaning on the Child** *(done as the child awaits unification)*
- Identify & understand the psychological, social, physical, economic, cultural effects of these meanings on the CBOW

**Step 4: Understand the dynamics within & outside the receptor group**
- Study the power base of the social group and its relationship with other social groups
- Identify social networks or persons that the perceived receptor group may rely on for support
Step 5: Understanding the needs of a CBOW:

- Identify the emotional needs of the child
- Identify the physical needs of the child
- Identify the health needs of the child
- Understand the growth and development needs of the child

Step 6: Negotiation:

- Apply results of tools/steps 1-5 above to the actual building of a positive and healthy social relationship between a CBOW & the receptor unit.
- The assumption here is that the facilitator(s) will be equipped with the necessary skills of undertaking a negotiation and counseling among others.
3. Understanding the effects of the meaning on the Child

Negatives from non fulfillment of meanings of behaviour
- Low self esteem & other interpersonal ‘defects’
- Loss of ‘family’ environment
- Stigma & rejection (outsideness)
- Escape routes further drives child away
  (Isolation, servitude)
- Live at the periphery of receptor group
- Failure to ‘fit’ and belong

Positives from fulfillment of meanings of behaviour
- Safety net for Child
- Child becomes an ‘insider’ and benefits from
  Privileges and opportunities available to members of the family.
- Normal growth and development in own family
- Child will have right to a home and welfare
- Reduction in stigma in the family
- Access to a parent (mother)
- Opportunities to grow and develop in a family environment

2. Understanding the meaning of the behavior challenging meanings:

- Birth out of wedlock a shame & disgrace to family
- Lineage determines child’s destination
- Question of identity & LRA symbolism
- Externally influenced ‘conditions’ for acceptance of CBOW
- Questioning the interpersonal attributes of CBOW
- Non fulfillment of local conditions
- Agents not well trained/prepared to manage the delicate situations of CBOW
- Local leaders not sensitized to support CBOW social needs
- CBOW needs not a priority

Positives:
- Interpersonal attributes of a next of kin could favour CBOW outsider group
- Jural tools for shaping identity (Naming, Luk, bride wealth)
- Right to parental line age benefits (patriclan)
- Unfavorable attributes concealed from outsiders (coping mechanism)
- Continuity of family/lineage guaranteed

1. Understanding behavior of social group (receptor)

- LRA behavior
- Receptor family demands, expectations & actions
- Peers & community expectations & demands
- Mothers & coping routes
- Government agencies & NGO preparedness
**Tools for determining needs**

There are many approaches and tools that can be used in assessing the needs of the child in each of the steps suggested. Social workers may choose, depending on the context, to apply child assessment tools that are most crucial to child welfare which may include instruments that provide comprehensive assessments of child well-being, strengths and competence and those that have been normed with a child welfare population or appropriate for child welfare use. Instruments that have demonstrated sound psychometric properties may also work.

Assessments for social integration of CBOW may fall in each of the four domains of infancy and childhood; namely Language, cognition, physical and socio-emotional (Capute & Accardo, 1996).

The normal developmental process which includes physical development and socio-emotional functioning (Capute & Accardo, 1996) are especially important to rely on since these are some of the global measures of well-being. Because some of the children may not be old enough to verbally communicate, assessment may occur in the form of behavioral observation and reports from parents, care providers, or teachers. These would enable a facilitator to identify potential problems early in order to prescribe and administer interventions.

Important also is that assessment of child well-being requires interdisciplinary collaboration because of the multidimensional nature of the child. The facilitator needs to mobilize and work with other professionals, family and other influential members of the group e.g. clan leader). A child’s social ability and attachment – both important factors of a child’s well-being – are also important for assessing (Davies, 2004).

During the field work, the study came across the application of the “Family group conferencing tool”, a concept which was in use by the social workers of Facilitation for Peace and Development (FAPAD) - an NGO based in Lango - to facilitate families in crises in identifying root causes and sustainable solutions to problems depriving their children from enjoying a secure and fulfilling environment. The tool encouraged families to be on the “driving seat” and, with their approval, brings on board a multidisciplinary team comprising of local actors who then respond with their expertise during implementation of the family action plan. We recommend this facilitation tool for addressing the needs of these children as well.
Summary of Lango/Luo model for integration of CBOW: See figure 1 below

(a). There is always need to understand the social context in order to understand the concerns around CBOW and (b), that groups have diverging capacities and abilities to handle the impact of this entry of CBOW
Voiceless Victims: War Trauma through the Lens of Children’s Art

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Innovations in Peacemaking creates and implements programs that foster connections between people, that build understanding, respect, and appreciation for differences, and that promote cooperation within and between local and global communities. We encourage, train and support grassroots efforts in pursuit of human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice, which we view as prerequisites for world peace.

ABSTRACT

Voiceless Victims is a project that will examine consequences of armed conflict on children through their artwork and poetry, showing the ways children are involved in conflicts and the substantial impact that has on children’s mental and physical well-being. Histories of childhood and activist art are also covered.

Figure 1: Summary of steps for integration
VOICELESS VICTIMS: WAR TRAUMA THROUGH THE LENS OF CHILDREN’S ART

The tank, bigger than the hut, fires
and all of the colors explode from the hut.
Why is this man green?
Because he is from the tank.
Why is this woman red?
Because she was shot in the face.
And why aren’t you colored in?
Because it is like I wasn’t even there.

From an eight year old Darfuran girl’s drawing

Play is the way children practice for the adult world. Anyone who has watched a small child lift a wooden aircraft into the air while making airplane noises or intensely color with crayons knows how a toy or drawing stimulates a child’s imagination. These are the turnstiles through which a child enters later life. For many children, however, war and conflict are the prevailing reality. There, an aircraft toy takes on another meaning entirely.

People generally do not wake up thinking about children in war. They do not arise thinking about young girls forced into sex slavery for soldiers, children being marched at gunpoint into pits of fire, schools being blown up, skies darkened with guns and bombs, kids never seeing their parents again as they are force marched across bleak landscapes, starved along the way.

With their basic infrastructures destroyed, war-torn countries are challenged to connect with the world. The same can be said about the children of those countries, whom I call the Voiceless Victims – those without a voice. This paper describes a project that looks at the effects of the destruction of homes, displacement of families, ethnic cleansing, the atrocities of violence, oppression and genocide, breaking through the silence with a visual vocabulary of war as seen through the artistic and poetic expressions of the children in the midst of these wars and incursions.

HISTORIES OF WAR ART, ACTIVIST ART, AND CHILDHOOD

War Artists

Documenting the atrocities of war is not a new phenomenon. Artists have depicted military campaigns and other wartime events for hundreds, and perhaps thousands of years. The work of war artists may show how war shaped lives, or may commemorate aspects of the war itself. (Imperial War Museum, 2008) War artists explore the visual and sensory dimensions of war, often
absent in written histories or other accounts of warfare. (Australian War Memorial, 2013) They record military activities in ways that cameras and the written word cannot. A war artist creates a visual account of the impact of war by showing men and women who are waiting, preparing, fighting, suffering, celebrating, or destroyed, as in Vasily Vereshchagin’s 1871 painting, *The Apotheosis of War.* (Canadian War Museum, 2005) The role of the artist and his work embrace the causes, course, and consequences of conflicts. (Imperial War Museum) Their art collects and distills the experiences of the men and women – and children – who endured in it. (U.S. Naval Historical Center, 2001).

Official war artists have been appointed by governments for information or propaganda purposes and to record events on the battlefield; but there are many other types of war artists. These can include combatants who are artists and choose to record their experiences, non-combatants who are witnesses of war, and prisoners of war who may voluntarily record the conditions under which they are being held captive, or be appointed war artists by senior officers.

And they can also be children.

*Picasso’s Guernica*

"Protest", "activist", or "resistance art" are broad terms that refer to creative works that concern or are produced by activists and social movements. While it is difficult to establish a history for this type of artwork because many variations of it can be found throughout history, we note that the most effective political actors have married the arts with campaigns for social change. If I were to ask for an example, many of us would immediately think of Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*, which crossed the boundary between war art and activist art. It is modern art's most powerful antiwar statement, created by the twentieth century's most well known and perhaps least understood artist. But this mural is not what Picasso has in mind when he agreed to paint the centerpiece for the Spanish Pavilion of the 1937 World’s Fair.

For three months, Picasso had been searching for inspiration for the mural. He was, at the time, sullen, frustrated by a decade of turmoil in his personal life, dissatisfied with his work and with the politics of his native homeland also troubling him as a brutal civil war ravaged Spain. Generalissimo Francisco Franco promised prosperity and stability to the people of Spain, yet he delivered only death and destruction. Picasso generally avoided politics, and disdained overtly political art, yet he was asked to paint a mural that would be a bold visual protest to Franco's treachery.

On April 27, 1937, unprecedented atrocities were perpetrated on behalf of Franco against the civilian population of a little Basque village in northern Spain. Chosen for bombing practice by Hitler's
burgeoning war machine, the hamlet was pounded with high explosive and incendiary bombs for over three hours. Townspeople were cut down as they ran from the crumbling buildings. The small town of Guernica burned for three days. Sixteen hundred civilians were killed or wounded.

Living in Paris at that time, Picasso was stunned by the stark black and white photographs accompanying the news of the massacre at Guernica. Appalled and enraged, Picasso rushed to his studio, where he quickly sketched the first images for the mural he would call Guernica. From the beginning, Picasso chose not to represent the horror of Guernica in realist or romantic terms. Key figures – a woman with outstretched arms, a bull, an agonized horse – were refined in sketch after sketch, then transferred to the large canvas. Three months later, Guernica was delivered to the Spanish Pavilion, where the Paris Exposition was already in progress. Located out of the way, and grouped with the pavilions of smaller countries some distance from the Eiffel Tower, the Spanish Pavilion stood in the shadow of Albert Speer’s monolith to Nazi Germany.

Initial reaction to the painting was overwhelmingly critical. The German fair guide called Guernica "a hodgepodge of body parts that any four-year-old could have painted." It dismissed the mural as the dream of a lunatic. Yet, Picasso's Guernica would become a universal, unsettling indictment of war and an enduring and powerful symbol warning humanity against the suffering and devastation of conflict. (Escalona, Alejandro, 2012)

What do you think an artist is? An imbecile who has only eyes if he’s a painter, or ears if he’s a musician, or a lyre at every level of his heart if he’s a poet, or even, if he’s a boxer, just his muscles? On the contrary, he’s at the same time a political being, constantly alive to heartrending, fiery, or happy events, to which he responds in every way [. . . .] No, painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy. (Picasso, Pablo)

**Attitude Toward Children’s Art**

After, or even during disasters and atrocities, children’s artwork and poetry can have exactly the same impact as the war and protest art of adults, providing a stunning window into this experience of trauma. The way we look at and feel about children's art, however, reflects the interplay of two related, but different sets of ideas: how we feel about children, and how we feel about the artwork of children.

**History of Childhood**

Somewhere around the beginning of the seventeenth century, the perception of childhood – its duration, its perceived purpose, its requirements, its quality – changed rather significantly in the
Eurocentric world, a period Valerie Suransky identifies as a watershed for the modern notion of childhood. (Suransky, Valerie, 1982) A number of important forces worked together to change the nature of childhood, intertwining and influencing each other.

First, the idea of childhood as a separate developmental stage began to arise; second, the idea of who was deserving of childhood also began to broaden. According to Shulamith Sharar, (Sharar, Shulamith, 1990) childhood in Europe during the Middle Ages was a concept limited to the upper-class, while children of the lower-classes had a rather extended infancy period – to about age seven – but were then, essentially, tossed into the adult world. With the advent of Calvinism, and Protestantism in general in the late 1500s, the focus shifted, perhaps because of the rise of a middle class, perhaps because of the new religion's focus on the individual. The later development of industry also had a profound influence on the history of childhood in the lower classes. With the expansion of the factory system, for example, there was a great demand for labor. (Rose, Lionel, 1991) Given that the beginning of initiation into adult life occurred somewhere around age seven, it was natural that seven year olds should go to work in the factories and mines.

As industrial technology advanced, productivity went up and labor requirements went down. When children were needed less in the work force, they became a social problem in the new urban areas, which generated an effort to contain them: hence the dawn of schooling. At first, working children were required to attend Sunday schools, which attended to both their moral and academic needs, but these slowly grew in the direction of contemporary schools. As the idea of universal schooling grew, the minimum legal working age for children rose and the maximum number of hours a child could legally work declined, reflecting labor reform and child welfare acts of the nineteenth century. These not only established a minimum working age, but also helped to inculcate a new idea of the nature of childhood and to extend it to a wider range of social classes, despite working-class, urban parents who often opposed the limitations on child labor and the requirements for their schooling. As people became used to a particular legal definition of childhood, they came to consider it the norm.

Children’s Art

The spontaneous drawings of young children were not thought worthy of adult study and comment until the nineteenth century. And it wasn’t until the twentieth century did changes in aesthetic standards allow child art to be appreciated on its own terms. Early studies were done, in which children were condescendingly referred to as “it” and the child’s artwork as “scrawls.” But there were others who showed a deep empathy with the children’s work. Later, avant-garde groups, looking for inspiration in art forms that differed from those of academic aesthetics, began to study
peasant art, tribal arts, and the art of children. They took the primitive, the authentic, the expressive, and the inventive as measures of excellence. The untutored art of children fit this model well. During the last century, the interest in child art, and the value placed on its importance by artists, educators, and beginning in the middle part of the century, the emerging field of art therapists, reached its height.

From my perspective, while I am greatly appreciative of the aesthetic worth of children's expressive works, I am less interested in their artistic value and much more concerned with their importance as activist art. The prejudice against children's art is prejudice against the mind of the child, as seen in the ways children were dealt with in the early studies of their expressive works. But now, it has been recognized that if children’s art can offer us anything, it can be a frame of reference within which to examine our own values and attitudes. This artwork and poetry can give us a keener eye and a more open, active mind, to the devastation we, as adults, have wrought throughout the world.

**CHILDREN AS EYEWITNESSES**

Since the United Nations set up its office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1951, the number of refugees has grown into the tens of millions. Since the Holocaust, in which six million Jews, as well as millions of Roma, homosexuals, and others were killed, close to five million more people have been victims of genocide; many of those victims have been children. (Springer, 2006) During World War I, 20% of the casualties were civilians; in World War II, 50% were civilians; now, 90% of wartime casualties are civilians (Ellis, 2004) – again, many of the victims are children. Children also have been the direct targets in genocidal wars. (Ellis, 2004) Millions more children endure and witness atrocities. In the last decade of the previous millennium, some 10 million children were traumatized by war and civil unrest. (Hamilton, Moore, 2004) There are 70 million landmines worldwide; close to 40% of those detonated maim or kill children. (Mankell, 2003) Clearly, more and more children are forced to deal with overwhelming suffering.

“The artist’s job is to be a witness to his time in history,” said the artist Robert Rauschenberg, and so it is with our young artists. Seeing, as we know, comes before words. A child looks and recognizes people, places and things before she or he can speak. All infants have the capacity and desire to imitate adult human behavior, an instinct evidenced by their frequent mirroring of adult facial expressions. So, imagine the data taken in during the long, wide-eyed hours of childhood in the Middle East, or in Afghanistan, or Cambodia, or Rwanda, Burma, Chechnya. Imagine the tension, worry and preoccupation on the faces of the adults; imagine the looks on the faces of the soldiers as they patrol the streets, or search homes, or roust families. Imagine the hundreds upon thousands of violent scenes that could and do play out in front of children living in war zones. This is their world.
It surrounds them day in and day out. And oftentimes, they have not only no words, but no opportunity to tell us what they think and feel about what is happening around them.

The atrocities of war have created horrific negative and damaging effects on the development and mental health of children, many of which have been documented since World War II. The impact of genocidal war, armed conflict, and civil strife is measured not only by physical damage, but also by persistent emotional trauma. While physical injury resulting from armed conflict is not to be minimized, children are also devastatingly affected by the emotional trials of attack and injury, and by the disappearance of their parents, friends, and loved ones. (Gangi, Barowsky, 2009) The consequences for children are both acute and long-term. Stigma and discrimination, cognitive impairment, bedwetting, stuttering, falling mute, eating and sleep disorders, lingering feelings of shame, fear and guilt, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal behavior, self-harm, becoming violent themselves, and, arguably the worst effect, the normalization of violence are but a few of the devastating impacts of war on children. Those who survive the onslaught must cope with sometimes crushing physical and emotional scars.

**Children's Art and Poetry from War**

Considering the large populations of children who have, and are currently, experiencing the trauma of war and conflict, it is time to move forward from seeing the production of their artwork and creative writing as strictly a beneficial therapeutic tool. The artwork and poetry from these children – many dead but countless still alive – need to be seen as documentation and urgent records of the atrocities to which they have been subjected, working at the intersection of art and activism. Seen collectively, this artwork and poetry provide considerable insight into war. It is impressive for its realism and the veracity of keenly observed details. Intensity of emotional response is characteristic of this artwork and poetry. The children's creative processes, as well as critical analytic judgment, are of an order far removed from what's possible for children living in safe and loving environments.

In my view, in this artwork and poetry from children of war, reality takes tangible form as children gain a measure of mastery over violent forces that govern their lives. Often simple, but no longer naïve or innocent, they show with aggressive clarity everything from claustrophobic bunk beds inside Nazi concentration camps to the unspeakable terror and agony of the child in Darfur. Or Vietnam. Or Syria. Or Kosovo. One is impressed that these children are documenting situations and events that they might know to be of historical importance. Often, the implements of modern warfare are pictured with an accuracy that permits identification of airplanes and tanks by type. One must wonder, under what circumstances are the children able to watch attacking planes so closely as to be able to memorize them in such detail?
The *Voiceless Victims* Project

The need for better data and research on the issue of violence against children was highlighted in the 2002 WHO World Report on Violence and Health, and in the 2006 United Nations Study on Violence Against Children. This need has also been reiterated in the 2011 annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children.

The studies will be done. The data will be collected and disseminated. But at the same time, could we not also ask the children themselves to raise their voices, through their artwork and poetry, on behalf of their hopes and expectations that the adults who have perpetrated the wars, conflicts and incursions fulfill their obligations to children as rights-holders? I think we can, and must, facilitate that. It is now time that not only governments, but individuals throughout the world, come face to face with the detritus of what we have allowed to happen, and accept, fully, the core message from these children: that no violence against them is justifiable, and that all violence against them is preventable.

For the past 20 years, I have been working on a project I’ve titled Voiceless Victims, and now I need your help.

The *Voiceless Victims* Project will ultimately examine consequences of armed conflict on children through their own artwork and poetry, showing the ways children are involved in conflicts and the substantial impact that has on their mental and physical well-being, while taking a close look at the diverse perspectives of the shared human experience of war.

*Voiceless Victims* will be a comprehensive collection that documents, presents and interprets powerful artwork and poetry from children who faced, and are facing, war and conflict throughout the world. Paintings and poetry by these children of war provide an imprint of the times and places in which they live, while providing us with tangible and powerful insights into the tragic human dimension of children without childhood. What will be illustrated in the *Voiceless Victims* exhibition, book and curriculum, depicted with scrupulous attention to detail, are first-hand accounts of atrocities – war scenes, bombings, evacuations and forced marches, killings, torture and other soulless mayhem.

This exhibition will travel through actual and virtual means – from the United Nations and the Hague to schools and individuals throughout the world. These voiceless children will stand before us all so we can see through their eyes what war and its aftermath looks and feels like to them. At every venue, the location coordinator will be encouraged to mount a concomitant exhibition of the artwork and poetry of children at risk from the community in which the *Voiceless Victims* exhibition
will be shown. These could be pieces from children whose parents have been deployed to war; children who have been affected by gang terror; those who have become addicted to drugs and/or alcohol; unfortunately, the possibilities are endless. Violence against children cuts across boundaries of geography, race, class, religion and culture. It occurs in homes, schools and streets; in places of work and entertainment, and in care and detention centers. Perpetrators include parents, family members, teachers, caretakers, law enforcement authorities and other children. Some children are particularly vulnerable because of gender, race, ethnic origin, disability or social status. No country is immune, whether rich or poor.

And at every venue, a quiet place and supplies will be provided for on-the-spot drawing and writing, enabling the exhibition’s viewers a place to react, reveal, and/or respond.

The book that will accompany the exhibition will begin with an overview of children’s expressions of art and poetry from past wars and conflicts along with an illuminating essay, providing a contextual framework for the current work and artwork from children in war and conflict situations in general. In each section, context for the work created in current and recent conflicts will be added by including quotations from the children where available about why they created their artworks and what they mean. Visual documentary articles on some of the children whose work is featured in the book will also be included. The last section of the book will contain extensive resource material for further study and recommendations of actions the reader might take to ameliorate the situations that spawned these works of art and poetry.

While the vast majority of children in the world are not at risk in an ongoing war, these conflicts are not kept out of the classrooms, nor from the evening news. There is growing evidence that some of these “safe” children are also significantly affected by these world events, but also that they have enormous potential to empathize with the children in the Voiceless Victims program and become active to reduce or abolish the future causes of war. Therefore, a downloadable “active” curriculum will also be provided, meaning that students from around the world will be encouraged to submit additional teaching ideas to our website based on the issues surrounding the Voiceless Victims project. The real-life stories and videos of the children who were featured in the book will be presented in the curriculum, all of whom have survived living in war zones. Their stories tell of loss, terror, hope, desolation and strength. Lesson plans for grades K – 12 will be incorporated into the curriculum.
CONCLUSION

When I wake up in the morning, I imagine a world in which children are valued and where their care, protection and overall well-being are a social, economic and political priority. I see a world where children are respected as people in their own right and accorded the full range of human rights. I imagine a world where actions on behalf of children and youth match the lofty rhetoric of politicians. And I see a world in which the children who have been most abused by war and conflict are given the voice to help create these things.

If children live in war, they learn it and they perpetuate it. This frightening phenomenon is best described through the graphic expressions of children themselves. The world will witness through the Voiceless Victims project the true cost of war – the loss of childhood and the reality of damaged lives. This collection of artwork and poetry from children in war can provide a critical and fundamental service to humanity: the bridge to understanding the genesis of the next war. And the next.

Words tell stories, but art and poetry bear witness to them. While many famous artists have painted the horrors of war, the art of these children is compelling, raw, and honest about the terror inherent to human conflict. These artworks and poetic expressions demonstrate our innate creative drive to communicate the experience of trauma and to restore equilibrium in the face of intolerable lives. But most of all, the children’s drawings and poetry in Voiceless Victims will convey what is nearly impossible to say with words, and underscores our responsibility to honor these voices that might otherwise be silent.

Not long ago it was understood that it was better to forget than remember traumatic events and that children who witnessed violence would eventually stop thinking about these memories. Now, however, we know the importance of acknowledging, validating, and helping even the smallest witnesses tell their stories. The creative acts as simple as drawing or writing a poem can give young survivors a voice, while broadcasting to the world the need to stop the violence. To do anything less is to deny the significance of children as the future of this planet.
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Harnessing Traditional Practices to the Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa: Liberia and Burundi Examples

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ABSTRACT
The changing nature of armed conflict has been characterised by the use of children as soldiers, and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of these children back into society has become a primary concern for post-conflict African countries seeking to achieve sustainable peace. Studies have emphasised the crucial role of a participatory approach as major factor in ensuring success in DDR programme. However, limited attention has been given to the traditional cultural practises such as ritual and cleansing ceremonies for child soldiers in addressing psychosocial problems as essential components of reintegration. This paper, therefore, focuses on the crucial role and effectiveness of the traditional cultural practises in the reintegration of child soldiers in Post-conflict Liberia and Burundi. Data is derived from content analysis of studies on the DDR programmes. It argues that traditional cultural practises are integral to the success of the reintegration of child soldiers in Post-conflict African states.

Key words: Traditional cultural practises, Reintegration, Child soldiers, Post-conflict Liberia and Burundi, Africa
BACKGROUND

Radical transformation in the nature of contemporary armed conflict in Africa has led to an upsurge in the phenomenon of child soldiers. Indeed, in recent times, more than 300,000 children under the age of 18 are being used in hostilities as soldiers by armies, rebels, paramilitary and militia groups all over the world (Brett, 2000). This high level of incidence of child soldier, Williamson (2007) attributed to the location of camps near borders, particularly close to countries which provided little protection for refugees. As such, the lack of adequate protection for children in IDP and refugee camps makes them susceptible to attack and recruitment into child soldiering.

It is of the utmost importance that one recognises the fact that the consequence of child soldiering on the recruited children is calamitous. Indeed, Machel (2000) observed that the child soldiers are exposed relentlessly to extreme violence and suffering and become increasingly desensitized to the horror around them. In the case of girls, nearly all girls abducted into armed groups are forced into sexual slavery, subjected to physical and emotional violence, and forced to provide other personal services (Stavros and Stewart, 2000).

These child soldiers are recruited by conscription, abduction, or coercion. Brett (2000) argued that although some youth also present themselves for service, it is however, misleading to consider this voluntary. They may be driven by any of several forces, including cultural, social, economic or political pressures. Moreover, the pattern of recruitment varied from one country to the other. As Sesay and Ismail (2003) noted, in most African countries such as Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola, Uganda, Burundi, Mozambique, the pattern of recruitment takes the form of intimidation, abduction, force and conscription.

Many reasons have been advanced for the use of children as targets of armed factions. Maier (1998) stated that in many Africa states, the use of children as soldiers in internal conflicts can be attributed to the fact that unlike adult they are seen as cheaper to obtain, more malleable and easier to indoctrinate. In line with this assertion, Furley (1995) and Kelly (1998) have noted that many children from rural subsistence-level farming families joined the factions because of personal gains, including prospects for looting rather than because of any convincing political or military ideology. Other studies have stated that children joined rebel factions in order to avenge the death of a family member or relation killed during violent conflict (Sesay and Ismail, 2003). Another factor that necessitated the use of child soldiers is the nature of arms that are used in armed conflicts. The technological revolution in weapons systems, especially small arms since 1945 has encouraged under-age soldiering, especially the portable nature and easy availability of small arms (Klare, 1999).
Recent international standards and policies have defined this atrocity as a war crime and that the use of child soldiers is as unacceptable as the impunity that prevails for this egregious abuse (Becker, 2004). The Convention of the Rights of the Child recognised as a minimum age for voluntary recruitment to armed forces the age of 15. Under the optional protocol, States parties are committed to take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 do not take a direct part in hostilities (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2000).

The UN Security Council Resolutions 1379 (2001) and 1539 (2004) laid the basis for “naming and shaming” and taking steps against parties which persist in recruiting and using child soldiers (Talwar, 2004). However, as Fegley (2008) has argued, in practice child soldier use often fails to elicit action by the international community, beyond general statements of condemnation. The 2004 report of the Human Rights Watch indicated that there has not been any evidence of sanctions imposed on any government or armed group for using child soldiers (Becker, 2004). Therefore, as Becker (2004) rightly stated, this pattern of impunity enables child recruiters to continue to seek out children, who are easily lured or intimidated.

THE CHALLENGES OF DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILISATION AND REINTEGRATION (DDR) OF CHILD SOLDIERS IN POST-CONFLICT AFRICAN STATES

Since the early 90s, the process of Disarmament, Demobilisation and the Reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants plays a critical role in transitions from war to peace. The success or failure of this endeavour directly affects the long-term peacebuilding prospects for any post-conflict society (Knight and Ozerdem, 2004). The bulk of DDR interventions since 1992 have occurred in Africa and the outcome of these programmes have been mixed, whereas the agencies responsible for designing and implementing DDR are still developing best practice (Hanson, 2007).

Indeed, since the end of the Cold War, DDR has been implemented in countries emerging from conflict, such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan among others. However, a good number of these DDR programmes have failed miserably when one consider, for example the disastrous post-conflict situation in Liberia, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and so on (Rufer, 2005). In the word of Rufer (2005), the first operations in Liberia drowned between 1994 and 1997 in the blood of wars that flared up again and in Somalia, the UN intervention in 1993 ended in anarchy. On the other hand, there is no doubt that there are also remarkable successes, for example, Mozambique and Angola.
Much of the critique of the DDR programmes centres on the limited success in providing sustainable livelihoods for the ex-combatants. Another criticism of the DDR programme focused on the fact that most DDR programmes in the past targeted only males above the age of 18 years, who fit the international definitions of soldiers while women and children associated with the fighting groups were often excluded from the process. (Veale, 2003; McKay and Mazurana, 2004).

However, flawed as it may be, there is no gainsaying the fact that the DDR programme for child soldiers is very crucial for post-conflict peace-building in the war-ravaged African countries. While the effort of the DDR implementers is commendable, however, the effectiveness of these programmes in ensuring the human security of the returning children being reintegrated into a civilian lifestyle has not been well analysed. Integral to any DDR programme is the need to establish a safe environment which will ensure the personal security of the child soldiers (Berdal, 1996). Therefore, this paper focuses on the crucial role and effectiveness of the traditional cultural practises in the reintegration of child soldiers in Post-conflict Liberia and Burundi. Data is derived from content analysis of studies on the DDR programmes. It argues that traditional cultural practises are integral to the success of the reintegration of child soldiers in Post-conflict Liberia and Burundi. This is premised on a participatory bottom-up approach that will guarantee a successful reintegration of child soldiers through the active involvement of child soldiers, receiving communities, local implementing partners, and newly established national structures in the process.

There have been a plethora of studies on DDR which have emphasised the crucial role of a participatory approach as major factor in ensuring success in a DDR programme (Berdal, 1996; Meek and Malan, 2004; Colliers, 2004; Rufer, 2005; Boshoff and Frey, 2006; Buxton, 2008; Maina, 2009)). While acknowledging the fact that much of the literature on DDR is empirical and focuses on how programs should be designed and implemented (Walter, 1997; Spear, 2002; Meek and Malan, 2004), however, limited attention has been given to the traditional cultural practises such as ritual and cleansing ceremonies for child soldiers in addressing psychosocial problems as essential components of reintegration programmes.

As Theidon (2007) rightly argued, most DDR programmes still follow a traditional approach of focusing exclusively on military and security objectives targeting a rather limited population group. They lack an integrated gender perspective and are generally not linked to other processes such as justice and reconciliation during the transitional post-conflict period. Moreover, the qualitative information necessary for better analysis and development of reintegration guidelines is generally lacking (Hanson, 2007). Therefore, any attempt to build durable peace in Liberia, Burundi and other
post-conflict societies must ensure the qualitative reintegration of child soldier while working towards the long term effort of the cessation of their recruitment.

The crucial needs of the children have been overlooked for centuries and now that attention is being focused on their plight, the enormous challenges confronting these traumatised children should be given utmost priority that it deserves. The need for the holistic security of the individual as a necessary component of proper reintegration back into the community cannot be overemphasised. Addressing the physcosocial needs of the child soldiers therefore provides a useful benchmark to measure the efficacy of the reintegration initiatives for children soldiers. What are the major challenges to an effective DDR in Liberia, Burundi and other post-conflict states in Africa?

Generally, DDR focuses on various facets, but their central purpose is the collection of small arms, light and heavy weapons, disbanding of military structures and combatants and uniting ex-combatants and their families to adapt economically and socially to productive civilian life in any post-conflict society (Ball and Van de Goor, 2006). In the disarmament phase, the fact that many fighting forces and groups do not disclose the presence of child soldiers within their ranks, thereby preventing their inclusion in formal disarmament processes is one dimension of the problem (Machel, 2000). During demobilization, armed groups are formally disbanded and begin the transformation into civilian life. It may be followed by recruitment into a new, unified military force (United Nations, 2000). However, many demobilization programmes falter precisely because of flawed design and monitoring or insufficient resources.

Reintegrating into civil society is considered the most difficult phase of any DDR process (Rufer, 2005). Some has argued that reintegration difficulties push it beyond the scope of any DDR process, and, thus, this phase should be confined to reinsertion (Hanson, 2007). Reintegration is a multidimensional and complex, long-term process through which ex-combatants and their dependents are assisted to (re)settle in post war communities (the social element), become part of the decision-making process (the political element), engage in sustainable civilian employment and livelihoods (the economic aspect), as well as adjust to attitudes and expectations and/or deal with their war-related mental trauma (Dzinesa, 2007; Buxton, 2008).

While the term reintegration has commonly been used to cover all activities after demobilization, in practice, reintegration has been limited to providing reinsertion and resettlement assistance only (Alden, 2002). In this sense, the successful reunification of the former combatants with their family is considered as the success of the reintegration process. However, this action, while it may be a component of reintegration, is in itself not reintegration because the task of securing the life of an
individual which can be attained by ensuring the security of the post-conflict environment goes beyond family reunification and has to been addressed to ensure effective reintegration (Maina, 2009). As such, Maina (2009) stated that it is evident that the human security of individuals and local communities forms the backbone of any successful post-conflict environment.

The objective of reintegration is to reduce the former combatants’ ability and desire to become political spoilers, engage in criminal violence, or otherwise derail the peace and recovery process (Hitchcock, 2004). Therefore, social reintegration includes the sensitization of communities to assist in reconciliation and help to integrate excombatants into the communities (Porto, et al., 2007). Regaining acceptance may require community mediation and forgiveness or cleansing rituals. Key actors within these processes include public officials, community elders and leaders of religious organizations and local NGOs.

However, many reintegration programmes have tended to have a top-down approach ignoring the input of the local community (Maina, 2009)). Local involvement deals with issues of impunity and allows communities to feel involved in accepting the returning children, who have perpetrated many atrocities in their communities (Maina, 2009). Contrary to the view of Maina (2009), Buxton (2008) however has argued that community approaches are not necessarily appropriate or easily embedded in certain country contexts. The most successful experiences have been in those countries where ex-combatants had already begun to rebuild their communities before the DDR process began such as Uganda, Somaliland and Eritrea (Buxton, 2008).

Although, it would be naive, however, to assume that this pertain to all post-conflict settings, rather it only relate to those without any history of community-oriented development and reconciliation processes. In Sierra Leone, the former head of the DDR commission emphasised the lack of viable communities into which former combatants could reintegrate (Harsch, 2005). Another factor is that most ex-combatant preference for urban reintegration can pose operational challenges for community-based approaches, which are typically more sustainable and effective in rural areas and in cases where ex-combatants return to their former communities (Buxton, 2008). He cited the case of Liberia, where there was difficulty in locating and monitoring urban-based ex-combatants and of rolling out community-based approaches when the ex-combatant has no history of living in the community of return.

Another challenge is that funding often dries up at the reintegration phase in the DDR process, perhaps as a result of the failure of the donors to put into consideration the fact that ex-combatants need assistance to become productive members of the community, psychological counseling and
Donor funding is largely absorbed by the technical, more visible and time sensitive elements of disarmament and demobilization, to the neglect of more complex reintegration activities that require a long-term commitment (Muggha, 2006). For instance, in the case of Liberia, funding for reintegration was seen as so inadequate that the International Crisis Group was compelled to call on the international community to provide as a matter of urgency funds to finance the reintegration of Liberia’s ex-combatants (International Crisis Group, 2004).

The absence of full financial support for reintegration activities has resulted in long and destabilising delays in progressing from demobilisation to reintegration phases, generating ex-combatant frustration that has in turn undercut the assumed security-building benefits of DDR. In Liberia, a full two years after the D and D stages had been completed, 40,000 registered ex-combatants had not been given access to reintegration programmes (Buxton, 2008). This frustration, coupled with high poverty, has led to increased violence on the streets, public disruption and rioting at times, worse than during the wars (Dzinesa, 2007).

REINTEGRATION OF CHILD SOLDIERS IN POST-CONFLICT LIBERIA AND BURUNDI

Liberia and Burundi both experienced brutal civil wars which captured international attention, and had to undergo peace-building efforts lasting many years, and the persistent negative spillover effects of violence in neighboring countries (Rufer, 2005). The combatants involved in Liberia and Burundi armed conflicts committed widespread atrocities and destroyed much of their country’s infrastructure. Therefore, the challenges of gaining acceptance, finding employment, and accepting that the war has come to an end are often overwhelming for many child soldiers who grew up knowing nothing other than war (Ginifer et al., 2004).

Indeed, there was rampant use of child soldiers in both the Liberia and Burundi civil wars. Amnesty International (2004) pointed out that all the armed factions in Burundi were guilty of using children as soldiers. In Liberia, at least 20,000 of the estimated 48,000 to 58,000 combatants who need to be disarmed are under eighteen, thus falling into the category of child soldiers, and of these around half are females (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2005). While recent analyses have conducted an institutional post-mortem of the DDR processes in many post-conflict states by looking at how the UN operations might have been better organized, the programs better targeted, community ownership better obtained, however they also point to serious challenges that remain in the reintegration process (Walter 1997; Spear 2002; Meek and Malan 2004).

These child soldiers have committed atrocities associated with the conflicts in Liberia and Burundi, therefore, affecting the degree to which they faced difficulties gaining acceptance from their
families and communities. This is a crucial aspect of reintegration which captures the most local dynamics of the reintegration process and likely has spillover consequences for the extent to which combatants maintain ties with their factions and embrace the democratic process. Humphreys and Weinstein (2005) argued that the degree of abuse perpetrated in the local communities during the war is powerfully related to the level of acceptance of ex-combatants. Individuals who perpetrated widespread human rights abuses face significant difficulty in gaining acceptance from their families and communities after the war.

In Liberia, the consequence of fourteen years of on and-off war, in which there were at least 500,000 IDPs in the country, 280,000 Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries and at least 50,000 Sierra Leonean and Ivorian refugees within Liberia led to the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in 19 September 2003 (ICG, 2002; 2003). The disastrous consequences of the Burundi’s crisis necessitated the intervention by regional and international community through the African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB) in 2003 and the UN Peace Operation in Burundi (ONUB) in 2004 (Murithi, 2009). ONUB was the first peacekeeping mission saddled with the mandate of DDR responsibility (Jackson, 2006).

In the case of Liberia, the first DDR programme for child soldiers was initiated after the end of hostilities in 1997 with the goal of dismantling the belligerent parties though the hasty nature of the implementation of the programme rendered it largely a failure (ICG, 2003; Rufer, 2005). Liberia’s DDR process took place at a time there was rampant insecurity in neighbouring states of Sierra Leone, Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea (ICG, 2003). Though UNMIL claimed that comprehensive DDR was their priority and was successfully conducted, studies showed that they concentrated on disarmament and demobilization with little or no programme for reintegration (Wolf-Christian, 2005). Also, the DDR programmes were not timely and comprehensive enough to mop up surplus arms (ICG, 2003). The inadequate funding of the DDR programme and the delay in the reintegration process also constrained the provision of peace dividend such as jobs, education and money to the child soldiers and the economic empowerment of their immediate families (ICG, 2003).

According to Awodola (2009), in particular, the family re-unification component of the DDR programme was left to the international NGOs operating in Liberia who had to trace the families of the child soldiers (Kelly, 1998). The limited knowledge of the local context constrained the efforts of the international NGOs in unifying these children with their family. Equally important is that the psychosocial aspect which includes traditional cultural practises such as ritual and cleansing was downplayed (Awodola, 2009). The low emphasis on the traditional healing ceremonies which have been lauded as an effective and integral aspect of psychosocial healing and reintegration for child
soldiers rendered the reintegration process a huge failure (Honwana, 1997; Verhey, 2001; Stark, 2006). The reconciliation ritual and healing ceremonies would have significantly aided the acceptance of the returning child soldiers by the community and helped them in overcoming the traumatic experiences associated with the war (Williamson, 2006). The traditional practise rooted in the cultural belief system is hinged on cleansing the child soldiers and the communities of the grievous crime perpetrated by the returning child soldiers by seeking forgiveness from the deities.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the improper implementation of the DDR programme in 1997 is a contributory factor to the relapse into conflict in Liberia. Therefore, another DDR programme was initiated after the end of the 2003 conflict to address the shortcoming of the 1997 DDR programme. In the 2003 DDR programme, emphasis was placed on the family re-unification component which involved a broad spectrum of both local and international NGOs and some other religious organisations that played an essential role in reunifying former child soldiers with their families (ICG, 2003; Awodola, 2009). However, Buxton (2008) observed that many of the child soldiers have no history of living in the community of return and therefore found it difficult to reunite and adjust to traditional family and community settings.

The provision of educational and training opportunities was also a major component of the reintegration exercise in the second phase (Awodola, 2009). However, Hanson (2007) asserted that this measure may not be deemed successful because in Liberia, unemployment was around 80 percent after the civil war, thereby making it hard for ex-combatant to find jobs (Hanson, 2007). A significant aspect of the 2003 reintegration process was the inclusion of the psychosocial component which included ritual and traditional cleansing ceremonies for former child soldiers. The ability of the child soldier to gain acceptance from their communities after the atrocities committed would significantly aid their mental health and stability. However, the preference of many of the child ex-soldiers who had lost touch with their local communities for the capital, Monrovia where such traditional practises have been eroded by Christianity and Islamic religions reduced the numbers of those who participated in the traditional cleansing and healing ceremonies (Buxton, 2008). In terms of gender mainstreaming, the place of girl soldiers was not well defined in the programme (Awodola, 2009).

An analysis of the Burundi’s DDR process showed that in October 2001, the government and UNICEF signed an agreement on a programme for the DDR of child soldiers (Amnesty International, 2004). The Child Soldiers Global Report (2004) indicated that the reintegration programme was aimed at providing sustainable support to each family through appropriate assistance decided on an individual basis. ONUB completed the demobilisation and integration of former combatants and
provided training for employment and access to micro-credit schemes (Murithi, 2009). While psychosocial support and medical care were provided for those with severe illnesses and injuries, the traditional practises of reconciliation rituals and cleansing ceremonies for child soldiers was not an integral part of the reintegration process in Burundi.

According to a United Nations Report, over 500 child soldiers who fought on government side were demobilised by late March 2004, and most of them were reintegrated with their families (UN, 2004). Of the total number of 42,105 claimed to have been demobilised by the National Commission for Demobilization, Reinsertion and Reintegration (NCDRR), only about 13,624 ex-combatants were reintegrated (Boshoff and Frey, 2006). Moreover, only 4,766 guns were collected from the estimated 200,000 to 300,000 arms and light weapons used in the armed conflict (Jackson, 2006).

The programme initially targeted only child soldiers from the government, civil defence forces and the rebel factions, CNDD-FDD and FNL while child soldiers with other armed movements, estimated to number around 3,000, were slated for reintegration under a general DDR programme. This approach raised concern pertaining to the possibility that it might lead to some children not being covered by either programme (Human Rights Watch, 2004). However, ONUB succeeded in disarming, demobilising and reintegrating more than 23,000 former fighters from the government forces and other militias groups between 2004 and 2007 but many still lacked the necessary economic opportunities and could pose a potential security threat (Nhlapo, 2006).

It has been argued that the Burundi’s DDR programme was based on existing practises as applied in other missions such as those of United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMIL) and United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), without any consideration for the peculiarity of the Burundi’s conflict by the DDR planners (Jackson, 2006). For example, while in Liberia and Sierra Leone, few rebel groups with no armed wing of political parties existed, in Burundi, over 18 rebel groups operated with over 34 armed wings of political parties. Therefore, in a context of deep mutual distrust between strictly organised militias, demobilisation had to be carried out separately, and each militia was responsible for the security of 'its' DDR camp (Rufer, 2005). Moreover, the programme focused on adult ex-combatants with no adequate programmes for female and child soldiers (Rufer, 2005).

The failure to implement traditional cultural practises such as ritual and cleansing ceremonies for child soldiers in addressing psychosocial problems in the reintegration process is one of the crucial challenges that hindered the effectiveness of the programme. Perhaps if the local NGO were given enough opportunity to take charge of the reintegration process, the psychosocial components
would have been well implemented. Rather, over 13 United Nations agencies, 36 foreign NGO were
involved in the DDR process while very few local NGOs participated. Despite their limited number,
the few local NGOs achieved minimal success in the family unification for former child soldiers
(Boshoff and Very, 2006).

In this light, experience has shown that while peacebuilding actors are particularly effective at their
own level, their leverage at other levels is limited (Galtung, 1996; Douma, 1999). The community
must be treated and considered a legitimate stakeholder in the reintegration process. In addressing
the psychosocial component of reintegration, for instance, in southern Sudan, art and drama
therapy are perceived as beneficial to all categories of exploited children. Rituals and traditional
cleansing have been a part of child soldier demobilization and reintegration programmes since 2001
in many countries such as Angola, Mozambique, Uganda, Sudan, Liberia and Sierra Leone among
others (Winter, 2007). In Uganda, the ritual is performed by egg-breaking ceremony, whereas in
Sudan, demobilized children in these ceremonies simply lay down their arms and as a group move
forward towards crowds of relatives and neighbors with their backs to the weapons. They are
welcomed home, the weapons are often destroyed and the stage was set for their rehabilitation into
the society.

More could be done to use local knowledge about the reconciliation rituals and allow the community
to own and control the process. It is hardly contentious that traditional forms of justice and
reconciliation that guarantee restorative justice are critical in post-conflict situations, when large
numbers of perpetrators of violence, including child soldiers, need to be made to face up to their
deeds and to be reintegrated into their communities. Para-legal institutions and healing rituals can
sometimes offer ex-combatants opportunities to repent and become valuable members of the
community again (Zartman, 2000). It would be naïve, however, to assume that local processes alone
can bring about peace when the main issues have not yet been resolved at the national level.

CONCLUSIONS
It is evident that there are challenges in the DDR programmes for child soldiers that need to be
addressed so that it ensures the human security of the child ex-soldiers. There is a need for rigorous
research on the reintegration process of the DDR programme for child soldiers, given the limited
studies on this critical aspect of DDR programme. While literature has focused attention on the
disarmament, demobilisation and the reinsertion processes, there is need for a new direction for
research on post-conflict reintegration for child soldiers.
In particular, there should be a shift in analysis to the psychosocial aspect involving traditional reconciliation rituals and cleansing ceremonies. Such psychosocial aspects of reintegration process rooted in traditional cultural practices are only recently been given attention. Yet, studies have shown that local acceptance is vital to successful reintegration. Given the severe psychological trauma which child soldiers are known to have endured, programs seeking to rehabilitate them have to be therapeutic. There should also be a special measure to address the special needs of girls and adult female ex-combatant.

However, any attempt to build peace in Liberia, Burundi and other Post-conflict states must incorporate the cessation of child soldiers recruitment. The United Nations has played a lead role in the efforts to end the use of child soldiers. While these efforts has achieved modicum of success, the recruitment of child soldiers in most civil conflicts in Africa persist. There is a need for a decisive action by the international community to monitor and document the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts worldwide and take appropriate actions to halt these atrocities.
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Is it because we were children?
The aftermath of child soldiering in Yumbe District, Uganda

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the aftermath of child soldiering for 135 former child soldiers of the Uganda National Rescue Front II, a local rebel group in Uganda that signed a peace agreement with the Ugandan Government in 2002. When removed from the rebel camp, the FCSs were promised educational opportunities, but these never materialized. Serious grievances are currently still expressed by the FCSs towards the various parties that once promised them assistance; NGOs, the Ugandan Government, the Amnesty Commission and the UNRF II former rebel-commanders. Dealing with the absence of support, endless waiting, feeling powerless, abandoned and deceived, ten years down the road the former UNRF II child soldiers express hurt and have developed mistrust towards various institutions. Their mental well-being today seems most compromised by the developments that took place after the peace agreement was signed, that is, by their post-conflict experiences, rather than by their experiences in the bush.

Key words: Former child soldiers, long-term impact, post-conflict grievances, UNRF II, Uganda

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INTRODUCTION
The conflict in North-Western Uganda, between the Government of Uganda and the Uganda National Rescue Front II officially came to an end in December 2002 with the signing of a peace agreement. Ten years later the former child-soldiers (FCSs) who participated in the rebellion were encountered by the author. The overall impression was that serious grievances were prevailing amongst this group despite the passing of time. In analysing this case of the UNRF II FCSs, the paper has two aims. The first aim is to report on an under-exposed case of child soldiering and its aftermath in north-western Uganda and the questions this particular case provokes. Second this article aims to contribute to two leading approaches with regards to the study of (the reintegration and mental well-being of) FCSs. The first approach focuses on the long term impact of child soldiering through longitudinal research. The studies in this field convincingly challenge the earlier prevailing notions about former child-soldiers as a ‘lost generation’ (cf. Boothby 2006, Blattman & Annan 2008, Munive 2010). The second approach focuses on the impact of ‘daily stressors’ on mental health outcomes in post-conflict settings, acknowledging that these settings bring about highly challenging sources of adversity of their own (e.g. increased domestic violence, unemployment, difficult access to food or other resources, poverty etc.) that influence mental health, beyond the direct impact of conflict exposure (cf. Fernando et al. 2010).
Both of these approaches are relevant to case currently under study in which a profound dissatisfaction was observed amongst a group of FCSs ten years after their disarmament and return to the community. In my encounters with them they often displayed anger, frustration and feeling deceived, sometimes feeling revengeful. Such feelings were expressed in interviews and manifold informal, spontaneous conversations. Observations and interviews revealed that what was currently (ten years later) an important factor of distress in the lives of these war affected youths, were not so much their direct experiences with conflict in the past, but rather their experience of neglect in the aftermath of the peace agreement. While many promises were made since 2002 to this group of youths -by that time identified as child-soldiers- none of them were lived up to until now. In this article I argue that the continued living with hope and promises that were being constantly shattered and renewed over a 10 year period, has left the FCSs experiencing their lives as in limbo, which has affected their mental health, self-perception and social-political values.

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9 In Uganda a lot of attention by researchers has been directed towards child soldiering in the LRA- conflict in the central part of northern Uganda, a phenomenon much larger in scale than the one studied in this article.
WHAT MATTERS IN THE AFTERMATH OF CONFLICT?

An increasing number of studies aim to assess the longer-term impact of child soldiering (cf. Boothby 2006, Boothby et al 2006, Munive 2010, Song & de Jong 2013). So far the outcomes of this type of research are relatively positive. Longitudinal studies have shown that earlier concerns about generations of children lost to war (‘lost generations’) are untenable. Boothby for example shows that, in a follow-up study of former child soldiers in Mozambique after 16 years ‘the vast majority of this group of former child soldiers have become productive, capable and caring adults’ (2006:244).

At the same time, researchers do confirm specific forms of psychological distress that remain despite the passage of time, such as recurring thoughts of traumatic events, or for example developing distrust as a coping strategy (cf. Boothby et al. 2006, Song & de Jong 2013). The overall image nevertheless is positive in terms of confirming young people’s resilience, and these studies report no retreat to violent behaviour. Blattman and Annan (2008:18) state however that there remains a certain lacuna in our knowledge when it comes to fully assessing the long term impact of child-soldiering on (local) stability. For example the educational and economical gaps that impinge on war affected youths might eventually generate a breeding ground for new recruitment, they argue, stating that more research is needed in this field (ibid.).

One great challenge with all these studies is that comparison is difficult when it comes to assessing the long term impact of child soldiering. Styles of child-recruitment, types of conflict and circumstances and interventions upon return vary highly across the settings that we as researchers, policymakers and intervening parties aim to bridge in order to learn from each other. The current focus on the impact of ‘daily stressors’ appropriately turns our attention back to contextual factors in understanding specific continuing stressors that often derive from the particular (local) post-conflict settings (Cf. Fernando et al. 2010).

‘Daily stressors’ encompass a broad range of variables. The term was introduced to refer to the ‘stressful social and material conditions of everyday life […] often caused and exacerbated by armed conflict’ that merit more attention when it comes to fully understanding and addressing ‘mental health needs in conflict and post conflict settings’ (Miller & Rasmussen 2010: 12). This model challenges existing assumptions about the direct relation between war-exposure and trauma, and rather allows for a more holistic understanding of the relationship between conflict affected populations and enduring distress. The focus on ongoing (or chronic) sources of stress in children and youth’s life after conflict (Fernando et al 2010:1206) is extremely important in order to understand what exactly is at stake for them in the aftermath of conflict as we will see in the following case study.
METHODOLOGY

The data for this article were gathered during 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork between July 2010 and August 2012 in Yumbe District. They form part of a larger research project that focussed more broadly on the social navigation (Vigh 2006) by youths from Yumbe District in the aftermath of a period of recurring violent conflict from 1979 till 2002 and vis-a-vis the historical marginalization of the region. During an initial pilot study in July-August 2010 I encountered former child soldiers in an exploratory Focus Group Discussion. Four young men in this group of 15 youths were former child soldiers and displayed specific grievances related to their experiences in the aftermath of the peace agreement signed in 2002. This theme really dominated the FGD as non-ex combatant youth also drew the attention to the difficult situation of their FCSs peers. Around the same time I came into contact with Rashid, a former child soldier and optimistic local youth leader, who could nonetheless never stop talking about the impasse the FCSs in Yumbe found themselves in. Upon my return in 2011 the topic of the situation of the FCSs in Yumbe re-emerged constantly in conversations with Rashid as well as with other youths I would come across. Because this topic was so central to these encounters, I decided to focus part of the fieldwork towards this group of youths. I asked Rashid to introduce me to other FCSs. Consequently I developed key-informant relationships with 5 FCSs and spend times at their homes with their families, having manifold informal conversations and conducting participant observation. We later identified 21 other FCSs who were willing to participate in semi-structured interviews. Oral informed consent was asked before the interview would start.

Themes discussed during the semi-structured interviews included (1) the circumstances under which they came to join the UNRFII rebel group (2) levels of education obtained (before joining and after coming home), (3) re-integration experiences, (4) livelihoods, (5) current challenges, (6) reflections on the peace agreement of 2002 and the developments afterwards. Some of the 26 interviewees were living in their sub-counties of origin (such as Apo, Romogi, Kuru etc.), others had moved to Yumbe town or Arua, ‘looking for survival’.

On a total of 135 former UNRF II child-soldiers, 26 former child soldiers were interviewed (19%). A lack of time and limited transport possibilities were constraints to reach more informants. Furthermore the target group turned out to be quite dispersed. Some FCSs had joined the Ugandan national army (UPDF), and others had left for Kampala or South Sudan10 to look for work. Communication with one key-informant confirmed however that the situation and feelings of the

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10 Since July 2011 The Republic of South Sudan
FCSs staying in Juba, working as unskilled labourers, were not very different from the ones expressed in this report.\textsuperscript{11}

All data gathered were analyzed through a process of open coding (inductive approach). From this coding emerged the most important findings, which are presented in this article.

**CASE: UNRF II FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS IN YUMBE**

The UNRF II FCSs encountered hardly referred to their experiences in ‘the bush’, but they laid much emphasis on the confusing experiences they had had since they left the rebel-camp.\textsuperscript{12} Below I aim to give an overview of how events unfolded since the FCSs were demobilized.\textsuperscript{13}

In Yumbe District on 24 December 2002, a historical peace agreement was signed between the Government of Uganda and the Uganda National Rescue Front II rebels ending a range of armed rebellions and persistent turmoil in the West Nile region since 1979. Earlier, on 13 May 2002, while the peace agreement was still under negotiation, 135 children were already removed from the rebel-camp. They were handed over to UNICEF, the organisation that was to address their rehabilitation. According the FCSs UNICEF left them in the hands of the local NGO PRAFORD (Participatory Rural Action for Development) while UNICEF would look into possibilities of sending them to school.

PRAFORD had earlier played an important role in the efforts of bringing the rebels out of the bush (Mischnick 2009, RLP 2004). Together with TPO Uganda (Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation) they now organized a training to prepare the FCSs for their reintegration. After this 2 week training confusion arose. While PRAFORD communicated that they were going to organize vocational

\textsuperscript{11} Aluma: ‘When I reached Juba, and they (other former UNRF II child soldiers) saw me there, they asked me ‘Aluma, did you already benefit (meaning receive an amnesty package or resettlement money, JB)?’ I said no. (Then) for them, they said they want to join the SPLA. Others, they plan to get guns and they want to come back (to Yumbe)’. (Informal conversation with 3 FCSs 28-08-2012) The violent solutions these FCSs in Juba expressed were (1) joining the SPLA (apparently that was still considered an option despite the recent independence of Southern Sudan) or (2) returning to Uganda with a gun to start another rebellion or take revenge on certain people. (Guns are still very easily available and cheap in the Republic of Southern Sudan). According to Aluma, himself an FCS, many of the FCSs he met in Juba were unemployed and using drugs or alcohol, loitering around there without work.

\textsuperscript{12} Several explanations for this are possible. For example, one could contribute this to their agency of addressing only those issues which they believed could be addressed by the researcher: namely reporting on their current neglect. Other reasons could be: the relatively short enrolment of some FCS in the UNRF II, or the fact that most informants reported not being forced to fight at a young age, but performing ‘simple tasks’ in the rebel camp and being treated well in those camps. But overall it seems that they were currently most distressed by their experience of neglect which provoked their emphasis.

\textsuperscript{13} I present here the unfolding of events as it was perceived by the FCSs from their perspective. It has been hard to verify some parts of their account because of a lack of documentation on some details and the unwillingness of some institutional actors (NGO’s, UNRF II) to go into details about these events. The FCSs nevertheless shared a coherent narrative about what had (not) happened and this was confirmed by adult informants in the community.
training, 75 amongst the 135 FCSs indicated they were not interested in vocational training, and that they wanted to continue with formal education. PRAFORD told them they could not help them, and advised them to seek support from their parents. These boys went home, still expecting to hear more from UNICEF. Meanwhile the remaining boys were also sent home by PRAFORD to spend some time with their families before they would be called back for vocational training. According to the interviewees they returned home with a 1 inch mattress, a plate, a towel and 5,000 Ugandan Shillings for transport. Neither UNICEF nor PRAFORD ever called the boys back. But, in December 2002 it was formally agreed in the final peace-agreement that the government would ‘facilitate the One Hundred and Thirty-Five (135) Child Soldiers who are interested in going back to school’ (Article III, point 8, Peace Agreement, 2002). This raised the expectations that their return to school would now shortly be possible; the new school year was just around the corner. It soon turned however, that the FCS had to wait for years. Only in 2007, there was communication from the Government of Uganda, through their former rebel-leaders, that they could register in schools and would be paid for. But as they enrolled in Secondary Schools in Yumbe, they had to withdraw before sitting for their exams, as their school fees appeared not to have been paid for by the government after all. The general feeling of being deceived by all these different actors is still prominent and the FCSs suspect the mismanagement of funds meant for their education at various levels, impeding them from going to school and progressing towards their future.

Adding up to the stress caused by the failure to access education despite all the promises, the FCSs also never received an amnesty card. The latter were distributed in the rebel camp (under the Uganda Amnesty Act of 2000) while the FCSs were already removed by the camp by UNICEF. With the cards came an amnesty package of 263,000 Ugandan Shillings and various items to facilitate the re-integration of the ex-combatants at home, such as a mattress, saucepan and a hoe to start

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14 The latter was only given to the group who were sent home to wait for vocational training according to the informants. In May 2002 the value of 5,000 Ugandan Shillings would be comparable with around 3 euro’s (http://www.oanda.com/lang/fr/currency/converter/).
15 While in 2006 finally a large skills and vocational training by PRAFORD was established under UNIDO, a program meant to train around 3000 people, none of the interviewees had been able to access this programme. Although the programme explicitly aimed to target veterans and ex-combatants and their relatives, it is not clear why the former UNRF II child soldiers were not selected for any of the trainings that lasted until 2008.
16 ‘Voice of the Former Child Soldiers of the Defunct UNRF II’ : Letter to the Chairman of the Amnesty Commission, dated 23rd of February 2010, copy in the author’s possession. Different informants contradict each other when it comes to the year in which the FCSs were invited to enroll themselves in school. Other sources mention the year 2004 and 2005.
17 Some FCSs eventually managed to go back to school by finding their own funds. Nine out of the 26 FCSs interviewed never had this chance. Only 12 FCSs out of the 26 interviewed were able to reach up to secondary school, but none of them managed to secure the support to reach beyond Secondary 4.
cultivation. While the former child soldiers voiced their concerns in a letter to the Amnesty Commission in February 2010\textsuperscript{18} about still not having received their amnesty cards and they were visited in May 2010 by the Amnesty Commission to have their photos taken, the cards were still not processed in August 2012. Let alone have the FCSs received an amnesty package, something they feel they are entitled to. The FCS in the interviews expressed serious concerns that various actors had tried to intervene in the registration exercise by the Amnesty Commission in 2010, by erasing their names and photos, and inserting their own relatives on the list in order to benefit from the amnesty packages at the cost of the FCS. Whether true or not, what is clear is that the prevailing uncertainty about their access to these cards and lack of proper communication between the various parties involved (Amnesty Commission, former rebel-leaders and FCSs) gives rise to more and more suspicion and rumours.

Accessing the amnesty card is very important for the FCSs. It appears this is not because this warrants their exemption from legal prosecution for acts committed under the UNRF II, something they do not express concern about. Rather their concern concentrates around the their believe that without their amnesty card they will never have a chance to access the 4,2 billion Ugandan Shilling that the government promised for the UNRF II in the peace agreement for the resettlement of all ex-combatants (Article III, point 3, Peace Agreement, 2002).\textsuperscript{19} In reality this money has long been distributed through the former rebel-leaders to their clientele, and many other UNRF II ex-combatants also claim not to have received their share. Yet in the eyes of the FCSs receiving the amnesty card will acknowledge their right to a share of this sum, and a possible belated payment.\textsuperscript{20}

10 YEARS LATER: ANALYSIS

In the case presented above it became clear how the UNRFII FCSs have been waiting extensively to access what has been promised to them. In this part of the article I will present the analysis of the impact this process had, amongst others, on the mental well-being of the former child combatants. As discussed earlier in the methodological section, the FCS presented themselves in the field as particularly affected by the course of events in the aftermath of the peace-agreement. They came across as troubled, sometimes unable to think of much else, pre-occupied with this topic. They often expressed feelings of defeat and deception, and sometimes feelings of revenge. Beyond this direct observation of emotions and frustrations, I propose here certain analytical themes that emerged

\textsuperscript{18} ‘Voice of the Former Child Soldiers of the Defunct UNRF II’
\textsuperscript{19} Payment of this money started only in 2004 (RLP 2004).
\textsuperscript{20} Ex-combatants nationwide have come to rely strongly on this perception of entitlement, a development nourished by the Ugandan Government under former rebel-leader president Museveni. It is widely accepted that such a payment might take ages, but precedents have fostered hope that eventually, they will be ‘recognized’ and ‘paid’.
from analyzing the data and will help shed further light on why and how the unfolding of events in the past 10 years has been able to have this effect. While the themes are separated here for analytical purposes, in reality they are very much intertwined.

**The impact of waiting**

Since the handing over of the UNRF II child soldiers to UNICEF up to the present, this group of youths remains hoping for education, access to an amnesty card an package, and for financial compensation. Up to now none of these expectations have been fulfilled. Several times over the course of the past 10 years, these hopes were shattered but also renewed. One moment in which their hope was renewed was when they were send to school in 2007, with the promise that the government would pay their school fees, only to be send home later. Or when in May 2010, the Amnesty Commission gave hearing to their request to register them while the outcome of this exercise remains unclear. This process of waiting over the course of ten years while having promises shattered and renewed has kept these youths in limbo. They have not been able to experience the progress they expected since they came in contact with UNICEF in 2002. While in their personal lives they have ‘moved on’, that is, most of them got married and became parents in the meantime, they express feeling stuck and abandoned as a consequence of this long period of waiting. The following citations express this feeling:

*Even our mind has become stuck.* (Arua, 31-10-2011)

*Since I came from the bush, I don’t know what I can do for myself and my family. I just remain like this. People send me to look after their cattle, but for myself I have nothing.* (FGD Romogi youth Drama Group 07-07-2010)

In these expressions we see a convergence of economic and social challenges with a more emotional experience of feeling stuck and abandoned. Being kept in uncertainty for a long time also makes the FCSs feel insecure about the future.

*The Amnesty Commission has already spoiled our future.* (Apo, 25-09-2011)

Waiting is also associated with ‘thinking too much’ which can be understood as ‘worrying a lot’ (Cf. Mains 2013). This has negative influence on the young men’s mental wellbeing, somehow unable to move beyond this point (hence the earlier mentioned experience of feeling stuck).

*It (not being compensated) makes me to think again and again* (Romogi 16-09-2011)

Quite surprisingly, it seems that the passing of time has not weakened expectations but rather enlarged them amongst the FCSs in Yumbe. While being kept in uncertainty, dreams of what one would do with the money they believe they are entitled to sometimes have become quite unrealistic, especially since the time of waiting has coincided with the devaluation of the Ugandan
The 263,000 Ugandan Shilling the former combatants once received from the Amnesty Commission was worth much more in 2002 than in 2012. At the same time the waiting coincides with the time in which young men are expected to have become adults in social-cultural terms. In the case of these particular FCS, while many of them moved into marriage and parenthood, waiting for some form of support, waiting for expectations that were not fulfilled to some extend is reflected in their concerns about their social status as respectable family heads.

[In case the compensation will be paid] It would be an opportunity to show I can manage the family. (Romogi 16-09-2011)

While becoming a respected head of family is difficult for many youths in Yumbe in relation to widespread economic hardship, amongst others, for the FCSs this struggle is particularly connected to their waiting to be ‘compensated’. This also explains, why amongst other reasons, they hang on to the identity ‘label’ of (former) child soldier.

Identity

The moment these adolescents were taken from the rebel-camp, they became ‘former child soldiers’. Their encounter with this external label has had far reaching consequences. The label, used predominantly in development-circles, has been able to raise the expectations by the youths, seeing themselves through different eyes now. They gradually came to understand the care that the international community tends to attach to this label, while at the same time experiencing that they were unable to access these resources themselves. Although the UNRF II FCSs live in Yumbe, they compare themselves with FCSs in other parts of Uganda (NRA bush-war child soldiers, and LRA child soldiers), whom they believe have received a lot of assistance with regards to education especially. 21 Access to accurate information in Yumbe about other post-conflict regions remains a challenge, allowing for inaccuracies to support these comparisons. Nevertheless, based on these assessments, the FCSs in Yumbe feel particularly marginalized and find it hard to detach them from this label, as they still hope for redress by NGO’s and/or the Ugandan Government at some point in time.

Another reason why these youths are not inclined to let go of the ‘former child soldier label’ ten years down the road can be attributed to what Mischnick (2009:84) and the Refugee Law Project (2004) described as an ‘environment of rewards’ that is dominant in Yumbe. This environment has come about through the peace negotiations and the government’s promise to the UNRFII rebel group of 4, 2 billion Ugandan shilling ‘for the resettlement of all UNRF II ex-combatants’. The FCSs

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21 ‘Voice of the Former Child Soldiers of the Defunct UNRF II’
in Yumbe will not be likely to give up their identification with the ex-combatant identity that is implied in the label ‘former child soldier’, because, as mentioned earlier, this entitles them to some financial compensation they still hope for. Hence the need exists to carefully preserve this identity.

In a context of economic deprivation, there is no wonder that youths cling to one of the few opportunities they believe will improve their life chances, such as the potential of being given vocational training or money in the future. But there is still more to the label of FCSs that explains their current position. Although it might seem awkward that these youths (many of whom are young parents, husbands) still cling to a label that refers to them as children. Yet in many respects they still identify with the position of the ‘child’ implied in the label. To be a child, in the cultural context of Yumbe strongly relates to being dependent on others. It is exactly this experience of dependency that influences the youths’ experience today. To be a child means to be in a powerless, social position and the uncertainty that comes with this socially marginal position was often voiced. Powerless in the patrimonial network that characterizes the former rebel-structure and voiceless with regards to ‘Big men’ in (local) government institutions, the FCSs feel incapable of addressing their situation themselves. This emphasis on their child-like position, means that up to today they expect their ‘problem’ to be solved through outside intervention, by their former rebel-leaders, government officials or NGO’s, and they have hardly undertaken any action to address their issue themselves. This means they experience dependency with regards to the institutions mistrust. This leads to ambiguous positions of disappointment and resentment, combined with hope towards these institutions.

In conclusion, these young men feel powerless for a long period of time now. Contrary to what Boothby et al. (2006:97) describe for Mozambique, in Yumbe, there was no ‘successful transformation of self-image from being a ‘child soldier’ to becoming ‘like everyone else’. The externally imposed label of child soldier has remained a prominent part of the identity of the youths in this study.

Social political values

Considering the poor and unpromising conditions of life after returning from the bush and the feeling of neglect and abandonment, it is not strange that some of the former child-soldiers mention ‘going back to the bush’ as an option they could consider. Feeling powerless in the face of corruption and unable to access to their rights under the Amnesty Act up to 10 years after coming home aggravates the grievance:

.....life has become hard. I now think it was better in the bush. As much as we did not have money, at least food was free...... [...] if it is possible again to join the bush, I will do it, not to fight against the
government, but against the former leadership of the UNRF II, because they are not taking care of us. (Romogi, 16-09-2011)

Until this time we are painful to this government. We as child soldiers we have suffered a lot. If there were to be any recruitment of force we could join. At this time we are still angry. (Yumbe Town Council, 28-10-2011)

Besides anger, be it directed at the UNRF II former leadership or at the Government of Uganda, the idea of living for free, of not having to worry about feeding their family is what would attract some of the former child soldiers to the bush today. However, it is important to note that these feelings are not shared by all the FCSs. Three informants referred to the counselling by TPO Uganda as having helped them not to feel revengeful. They rather believe in peaceful ways of conflict resolution. Others mentioned again different reasons for not believing in violent solutions:

Out of havoc some might say (they want) to join (a rebel group) again. For me it would only be like increasing problems. [...] If things (promises that derive from the peace agreement, JB) were fulfilled, no one would have been tempered.... I challenge the government not to let such things happen again. (Yumbe Town Council, 28-10-2011)

Despite being unhappy with the neglect by the government, and although I feel uncomfortable, I cannot make any mistake. (Romogi 16-09-2010)

When they are looking for people like us now, I cannot join, because they (the UNRF II rebels) have already deceived us. (Kuru, 19-11-2011)

Thus many informants also have their own reasons not to join (new) rebel-groups. At the same time, as also expressed by the three informants above, their disappointment and distrust in the various institutions (Government, former rebel-leaders, NGO’s) remains profound. The effects of these experiences in the future demand further research.

DISCUSSION
As argued in the introduction, the first aim of this article was to report on the under-exposed case of the UNRFII child soldiers in north-western Uganda and address the questions this particular case provokes. Second this article aimed to contribute to two leading approaches with regards to the

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22 Referring to new rebel-groups that might try to recruit rebels amongst the Aringa youth.
study of (the reintegration and mental well-being of) FCSs; looking at the long term impact of child soldiering and paying attention to ongoing stress-factors in the aftermath of armed conflict, that influence mental health outcomes.

In this article I have argued that living with expectations and disappointment over a persistent period of time left the former child soldiers in Yumbe in limbo for many years and has affected their mental wellbeing, self-perception and social-political values, more, it seemed, than their direct conflict-experiences. The effects on the mental wellbeing of FCS, of this extended experience of waiting, with expectations shattered and renewed by a variety of actors that do not seem aware of the impact thereof, should not be underestimated.

Indentifying the specific post- peace agreement sources of distress can make an important contribution to our understanding of the long-term outcomes of child soldiering in Yumbe and draws more attention to what can perhaps best be labelled as political ‘daily stressors’: specific power structures/ struggles (that include NGO’s in the fragile post-conflict phase) that have a negative impact on FCSs mental well-being in the aftermath of conflict.

Furthermore this study has shown that being indentified a former child soldiers has had strong implications for one’s identity. Even in the most remote places of the world this raises expectations, not in the last place because the labeling is done by (international) NGO’s. In combination with the ‘environment of rewards’ in Yumbe for ex-combatants, and the absence of educational opportunities that could foster reintegration (Betancourt et al. 2008) it has strongly reduced the FCSs ability to see themselves as normal Aringa youths 10 years after demobilization.

Feelings of disappointment and deception amongst former child soldiers after ceasefires or peace treaties are not uncommon. Quite often they are related to unfulfilled promises once made by former rebel-commanders (Song & de Jong 2013:8) or the unequal redistribution logics practiced by them after conflict (Hoffman 2003: 304). On other occasions these emotions are triggered by post-war government’s promises of employment, promises that are in reality hard to live up to for these governments (cf. Munive 2010b, Utas 2005). Less has it been acknowledged that NGO’s sometimes also play a role in the experience of deception and disappointment. In Yumbe, the accumulation of these experiences with a variety of actors has led to deep frustration and emerging distrust amongst the FCSs, the effects of which on the long term are still uncertain.

LIMITATIONS

This article aims to bring forward some important findings in the research with UNRF II FCSs in Yumbe. Nevertheless it is hard to be complete in the limited space here concerning the complexities
that surround this case study. A broader description of this case will be taken up in the author’s PhD thesis. For any questions, please contact the author.
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Post conflict trauma counseling to rebuilding livelihoods: A Community NGO perspective from Agago district, Uganda

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ABSTRACT
This paper documents the experience of a community based organization, Passion 4 Community (P4C), based in Agago district, in tailoring its interventions to meet the evolving needs of displaced youths and children affected by conflict. P4C’s activities initially focused on post-conflict trauma counselling to support the rehabilitation of former child soldiers and abductees, but have evolved to also deliver broader psychosocial services including livelihoods interventions. We explore the benefits of integrating psychosocial and economic livelihood interventions to increase the mental health and well-being of vulnerable youths affected by conflict. Two groups particularly at risk of depression and intense anxiety will be used as case studies to demonstrate the merits of this integrated response: (1) youths affected by extreme poverty and (2) female victims of gender-based violence. Finally, we conclude that the structured integration of psychosocial and economic livelihood interventions can result in a more successful rehabilitation process for traumatised youths by addressing their multiple and complex needs.

Key words: Post-conflict environments, Youth, Psychosocial, livelihoods

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INTRODUCTION: THE LEGACY OF A COMMUNITY DEPENDENT ON INTERNATIONAL AID

The town of Patongo was formerly an IDP camp, established at the height of the conflict between the Ugandan forces and the Lord’s Resistance Army. At this time, the community was heavily served by a number of large humanitarian agencies. The end of the conflict saw the departure of all major international relief agencies leaving the community of Patongo with no basic services, scarce resources, and an unhealthy dependency on food aid previously provided by the World Food Programme. The response of the government was to actively enforce a period of resettlement, in which severely traumatised families were told to return to their villages; many of which no longer existed.

Aside from the obvious problems of land conflict during resettlement, the community faced the additional challenge of reintegrating former child soldiers who were periodically dropped off by trucks in the centre of town. Many of these youths were severely traumatised and very few had access to rehabilitation services, having come straight from the bush or having been recently freed from LRA captivity by government forces.

At this time Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) reported severe problems of SGBV and 5% of households in the district reported the death of a family member due to domestic violence.

In some ways despite the ending of civil conflict, a new local conflict had begun, whereby youths were forced to fight for acceptance in their own communities. Tensions remained high; youths were suffering severe psychological trauma and were perceived as the enemy and either feared or hated by the community. This fear and distrust created a high degree of stigma and discrimination making their very existence a challenge, not to mention the additional challenges which they faced in accessing essential amenities or resources for their basic survival.

THE EVOLUTION OF COMMUNITY BASED SUPPORT FOR THE REHABILITATION OF YOUTH AFFECTED BY CONFLICT IN PATONGO

Passion 4 Community (P4C) was established in 2008 with the initial objective of delivering psychosocial support through targeted trauma counselling to the community of Patongo, in Agago district, Northern Uganda.

The formation of P4C was largely through the combined efforts of a group of former child soldiers. Under the leadership of David Lagen, who survived ambushes from the LRA, and Agnes Lagen, a former abductee, several youth leaders were appointed to establish their own peer groups within the surrounding villages of Patongo. These groups aimed to offer essential psychosocial support for former child soldiers many of whom at the time were either feared or rejected by their own
communities. Initial training courses were provided for the youths through a partnership with INGO, Network for Africa, who ran short courses in trauma counselling. Course attendance was high as the peer educators could see the direct impact of their interventions and they were keen to feedback to their own groups.

Following this training, P4C formed a partnership with Jubilee Action, a UK based Child Rights charity, and began expanding its psychosocial support activities to address a wider range of issues faced by the community; including but not limited to depression, trauma, sexual and gender-based violence, land rights issues, economic poverty and people living with HIV/AIDS. Many of these problems are not exclusively products of the conflict; they are however indicative of added vulnerabilities in an already challenging post-conflict environment and P4C recognised them as evidence of the “enduring trauma that surfaces in a number of forms such as domestic violence, suicide or alcoholism”\(^23\). The range of services offered by P4C gradually extended well beyond trauma counselling to include follow-up home visits, peer group support and referrals to relevant public agencies such as the health centre or the police.

As P4C’s presence continued to grow, community members increasingly saw their involvement with P4C as a unique opportunity to express their views and find their voice, which subsequently led to community lobbying for the establishment of a centre entirely dedicated to the rehabilitation of children and youths affected by the conflict (aged 12 to 30 years as defined in the Ugandan National Youth Policy). For the next three years P4C, in partnership with Jubilee Action, would drive forward the construction of a Youth Centre, which officially opened in 2012. The construction was achieved through the contribution of many youths who were trained in sustainable brickmaking techniques. Their enthusiasm and desire for involvement further demonstrated the critical lack of education and employment opportunities in Patongo – which was further validated through the enduring levels of depression and anxiety seen throughout the community.

The opening of the Youth Centre marked a further evolution of P4C’s services and in recognition of the positive impact that income generating activities were having on youth in the area, P4C set out to establish and train 30 Youth Groups in Village Saving and Loans Associations, aiming to support each group’s 35 members to establish income through social enterprise. Today, the Patongo Youth Centre provides individual counselling and education (vocational as well as literacy and numeracy support) to more than 1000 members of the community, in addition to an estimated 3,000 indirect beneficiaries who attend various community dialogue and advocacy events throughout the year. The

\(^23\) David Lagen, “Passion 4 Community – Psychosocial Department - Second Quarter Report”, 2013
P4C psychosocial team has grown over the years and it now comprises three fully trained counsellors (one male and two females), who are supported by ten peer educators. Each of the peer educators is responsible for the mentoring of three youth groups facilitated by weekly meetings, which enable them to detect and refer psychosocial support issues to the main office when required.

**Challenges in demonstrating the impact of community based support**

Due to the fast paced evolution of P4C’s services, one of the initial difficulties encountered was an accurate monitoring of the impact of their psychosocial interventions. This is in part symptomatic of the rate in which social structures were being rebuilt in the community following the period of conflict. In an effort to provide a baseline against which to assess the impact of future activities to promote sustainable livelihoods, in 2012 P4C initiated an action-led research project surveying 607 existing beneficiaries. The average age of the respondents was 26.3 years, of which 28% were former child soldiers or abductees, having spent between one day and ten years in captivity. The questionnaire had been originally designed to survey the participants of the Youth Groups and VLSA activities, as such, it did not address their psychological well-being specifically but rather included a range of questions aimed at providing P4C with raw data regarding their general well-being and livelihood. Apart from a section on health issues and access to health service provision, participants were mainly invited to describe their family situation, food security, their level of education, their perceived employment opportunities and their average level of income and savings.

The findings with regards to the economic situation of this sample population in Patongo painted a distressing picture of a community in which 86% of participants reported unpaid employment (such as subsistence farming) and the majority (37.2%) earned less than 10,000 shillings a month (less than 4 USD). These results informed the urgent need to expand the services of the Patongo Youth Centre, particularly in the area of vocational trainings and business management techniques to supplement the existing VSLA scheme.

Although the questionnaire did not explicitly link the levels of poverty to feelings of stress or well-being, it is worth mentioning that 25% of the respondents were receiving psychosocial support at the time of the survey. This echoes similar observations from P4C’s previous work on trauma counselling as well as feedback from community discussions. P4C recognises the importance of absolute poverty as a daily stress factor that challenges the successful reintegration of war affected youths and their psychological well-being. Principally former child soldiers find it hard to demonstrate their worth to their elders when they are not able to contribute either financially or

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24 Patongo Community Survey Report, Jubilee Action, February 2013
with a specific skill set. In response to this need, in 2013 a distinct Livelihoods Department was launched aimed at promoting sustainable livelihoods by coordinating a range of vocational trainings ranging from tailoring classes to brickmaking, carpentry and beekeeping.

**Breaking down barriers created by international aid dependency**

Post-conflict communities have often mistaken psychosocial support for financial support and Patongo is no exception. Many beneficiaries continue to expect material assistance from the counsellors, reflective of a 'high dependency syndrome that has affected the community during the emergency period'. When establishing training courses it was found that youth participants would only attend if meals were provided throughout the training days. It was also expected that these meals would contain meat which was very costly when training was delivered to over a thousand beneficiaries. A dependency on food hand-outs remains a significant challenge and continues to threaten the sustainability of the youth centre, as beneficiaries continue to expect 'something in return'. In addition, advocacy events organised by INGOs are now widely associated with the distribution of T-shirts which also remains a challenge to successful community level interventions.

**Contextual challenges which limit the impact of psychosocial counselling alone**

A more structural challenge to the success of the psychosocial interventions is linked to the weak and corrupt political infrastructure which prevents many clients of P4C from referring their case to the local court or the police when required. It is indeed frequent that a victim of land grabbing cannot afford the costs associated to the legal proceedings. It is also common that women victims of sexual abuse cannot afford to pay for the medical examination required to constitute evidence, let alone the bribes to prosecute her aggressor. Both examples sadly illustrate the limitations of psychosocial counselling alone to support traumatized individuals and resolve their well-being in its entirety.

**ENHANCING IMPACT BY OFFERING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT**

The barriers and limitations faced by P4C through their delivery of psychosocial support alone led to their consideration to combine psychosocial support with community owned livelihoods opportunities to support the sustainable well-being of their beneficiaries.

P4C has undertaken a review of both interventions – psychosocial support and livelihoods (which, up to this point, have been delivered in parallel), with a view to highlighting opportunities for a better defined and integrated system of support to its beneficiaries, enabling increased efficiency through

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25 David Lagen, Director of P4C, “Third Quarter Report – Psychosocial Department”, 2012
the coordination of the two programmes and more effective outcomes for the beneficiaries themselves. The following discussion elaborates on the findings of this review; interestingly, it reveals how the two interventions are already affecting and complementing each other, despite this not being their direct intention.

There is a well-known link between livelihoods and mental wellbeing and proven research to show that “the cognitive, emotional and behavioural effects of psychosocial impairment can severely undermine social functioning and productivity”26. Similarly, those suffering from a lack of skills or a source of income also suffer from distress or depression as many feel unable to support themselves, let alone their family. This is particularly true in the Ugandan context where income generation is heavily associated with status and a sense of self-esteem: being able to provide for one’s dependants is an important part of the transition to adulthood.

Throughout our efforts to document how P4C’s psychosocial and economic interventions can and do affect each other, particular attention has been paid to the most common cases handled by the counsellors of P4C: firstly, building sustainable livelihoods for girls and women and the associated impact of sexual and gender-based violence and trauma and secondly, extreme poverty and associated incidence of depression.

LIVELIHOODS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS AFFECTED BY CONFLICT: A STRATEGY TO REDUCE SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV)

The unique condition of women and girls affected by conflict is widely acknowledged: from the trauma associated with sexual victimization (commonly associated with abduction, rape and slavery) to the stigma suffered upon return to their community, especially by those who have conceived children in the bush. As such these young girls require complex systems of support in order to readjust to post-conflict life effectively. Patongo is no exception, and the reintegration of women and girls has been further challenged by traditional patriarchal attitudes and continuing cycles of SGBV amongst the community. Approximately 24% of all cases supported by the psychosocial team at P4C related to SGBV – including sexual violence and rape, domestic violence and structural violence such as the denial of rights to own land or the right to have an education.

26 The World Bank, Children and Youth Unit, “Youth and employment in post-conflict countries: the psycho-social dimension”, Volume 4, Number 2, September 2010, p.2
Those suffering from trauma and depression closely follow at 21%, and 14% of beneficiaries seeking counselling are affected by HIV/AIDS 27.

Although professional psychosocial support is paramount to the recovery of the clients, the very nature of SGBV incidents involving a ‘perpetrator’, depends upon the attitude of the family or the community at large to further the rehabilitation process though a legitimate prosecution (be it legal or customary),

P4C is already incorporating this dimension into its support to SGBV victims: extending counselling to the husband who might be responsible for domestic violence, visiting the families who prevent their daughters from attending school, and referring cases to clan leaders or the police in aggravated cases. Gender-based violence is also a recurrent topic of the awareness raising activities conducted by P4C: focusing on the education of the community about women's rights and gender equality.

Although cultural practices and traditional beliefs are a strong factor in the prevalence of SGBV the impact of poverty is also largely attributed to enhanced levels of discrimination against women and girls of post-conflict communities. Indeed, the experience of P4C indicates that the lack of economic opportunities for both young women and men in turn undermines women's efforts to achieve greater gender equality. This is evidenced by the rising incidence of gender based violence associated with household unemployment. Well-educated and financially secure women are far more likely to be able to defend their rights in a court of law or to police officers, as well as being less susceptible to corruption.

Girls and women are disadvantaged because referrals to the judiciary are futile without any financial autonomy or support from the family to fund the costs of the legal proceedings. This is particularly true for of land rights disputes where women have traditionally been denied access: the common practice of neighbours or male relatives stealing the land of widowers following their late husband's death has only been exacerbated by the conflict. Many women who have been away during the war were indeed never able to regain access to their land when finally returning to the community. In Northern Uganda, where more than 80% of the population depend on farming to support themselves, women deprived from land rights are left with very few alternatives to provide for themselves and their families.

All of the above emphasises that counselling alone cannot help overcome the trauma induced by the loss of income and that only the combination of psychosocial support with economic empowerment can fully equip women and girls with the tools they need to secure sustainable livelihoods, financial security and ultimately improve their overall wellbeing.

P4C’s experience further supports this notion: firstly, women’s participation in the Village Loans and Savings Associations allows them to build capital through borrowing from other community members and investing in an income generating activity. The money is kept in a community safe, providing further protection and independence to the women who would otherwise be at risk of losing control over their savings to their husbands or other family members.

Secondly, engaging in economic activities enables young women to interact and build relationships with the local community; greatly contributing to the combat of social stigma whilst also increasing their visibility. Indeed, P4C noticed a dramatic increase in the number of women taking on leadership roles or gaining confidence and assertiveness as a direct result of their participation in the VLSA initiative and various youth groups.

Thirdly, their diversification in small-scale businesses reduces their dependency on land cultivation as the sole employment opportunity, the limitations of which we have already described. Of course, this is not to suggest that land rights issues should not be addressed, in favour of alternative and more ‘gender friendly’ initiatives exclusively. Rather, it highlights how P4C can support women and girls in reaching economic empowerment when integrated programmes are implemented that include the provision of psychosocial support and livelihoods, despite the challenges associated with the increased vulnerability of young women in post-conflict situations.

The Child Mothers VLSA Group – which comprises young former abductees who gave birth to one or more children during their time in captivity – offers an excellent example of how both psychosocial and livelihood interventions are integrated and have translated into enhanced well-being of this particular vulnerable group. The group provides mothers with the opportunity to share experiences and receive mentoring and counselling from their dedicated peer educator, Irene. In addition, they have access to loans and savings, responding to their concrete demands for economic support as their children “need more than counselling, they need material help like games, food and clothing”28. Promoting women’s participation in contextually relevant income generating activities that allow them to juggle with other family responsibilities is a priority. P4C supports individual cases whilst gradually increasing gender equality amongst the community through on-going

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28 David Lagen, Passion 4 Community – Annual Report, 2011.
advocacy. For example, in 2013 Passion 4 Community is hoping to enrol more women in beekeeping activities which only require a few acres of land and a couple of hours of work per week.

The examples described above thus highlight how the combination of psychosocial support and livelihoods interventions can offer robust solutions to increase the well-being of women subject to conflict induced gender discrimination. In addition P4C have experienced that such an integrated strategy brings both responsive and preventive measures to address the high incidence of SGBV.

Extreme poverty and the associated levels of stress and low self-esteem are also important factors fuelling substance abuse and in turn the increase of violent behaviours. Similarly, both the community, and sometimes young impoverished women themselves, tend to resort more easily to early marriages in order to increase their chances of financial stability. The following section will explore, in more detail, the relation between extreme poverty, depression and anxiety as witnessed in Patongo by P4C.

ESCAPING EXTREME POVERTY TO REDUCE “ADDITIONAL STRESS FACTORS” IN POST CONFLICT COMMUNITIES

Over the past couple of years, studies have increasingly shown that financial hardship and an inability to meet basic needs constitute important daily stress factors amongst post-conflict communities. This is not to disregard the relevance of trauma associated with the conflict itself, but rather demonstrates the multiple and complex causes of psychological trauma. The lack of future employment prospects combined with feelings of social isolation and food insecurity are all factors of mental stress which take a toll on the psychological well-being of youth, particularly youth already affected by conflict situations. Although the resilience of war affected communities is widely acknowledged, because of their chronicity, daily stressors gradually erode people’s coping resources and compromise the benefits of other forms of support such as trauma counselling.

As already discussed above in relation to women and girls returning to their community, employment opportunities for the youths in Patongo are extremely limited. Accompanying the widespread displacement in Northern Uganda during the long period of conflict was extensive looting and destruction of livestock. In addition, many of the youths who grew up in IDP camps have little memory or experience of living in rural areas, further challenging their participation in

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29 See for example; MILLER K.E., RASMUSSEN A., “War exposure, daily stressors and mental health in conflict and post-conflict settings: bridging the divide between trauma focused and psycho-social frameworks”, Social Science and Medicine, n 70, pp. 7-16, 2010.

30 Ibid., p12.
traditional income generating activities such as subsistence farming or labouring. Perhaps more importantly, the traditional structures, that may have previously supported vulnerable members of the community in times of extreme hardship, have also been eroded by the conflict, without, to date, a new structure emerging. Both life in the IDP camps and the widespread displacement of the population has critically attenuated the social authority of traditional leaders who used to help mitigate undesirable issues amongst the community, and contributed to informal 'social security' for the poor. P4C is contributing to revive these community networks through the referral of certain cases to clan leaders as well as advocacy activities such as the organisation of community dialogues between youths and elders which have thus far proved successful in rebuilding traditional community support structures. However this is an on-going process that remains precarious and challenged by many contextual factors.

These factors are amongst the most significant that contribute to a high incidence of extreme poverty – with 70.1% of the respondents to our survey earning less than 1 dollar a day— that affects the majority of the youth in the Patongo community. Undoubtedly, the multidimensional nature of the hardship experienced requires a mix of psychosocial and livelihoods interventions. This is evidenced, for example, by the increase in the number of suicides or attempted suicides as a result of absolute poverty and/or prolonged trauma linked to unresolved land issues recently recorded by P4C; “this becomes a challenge to the team who feel that their efforts are in vain”\textsuperscript{32}. Even more disturbing is recent evidence to illustrate that 50% of the 34 cases handled between the months of April and June related to young women and men between the ages of 18 to 30 years, which demonstrates the relative impact on the youth population.

To further illustrate this point Passion 4 Community is supporting close to 40 Child Headed Households, totalling more than one hundred children and youths living with their siblings without any form of parental supervision. The resilience of Child Headed Households has been largely documented, as they impressively take on adult responsibilities while dealing with multiple vulnerabilities including very limited resources, family estrangement, nutrition or health issues. That notwithstanding, it is also recognised that these children tend to experience higher rates of depression and behavioural problems than their peers “who are not exposed to daily stressors such as hunger, poor medical and sanitary conditions (…), that increase the children’s anxiety for their own future and that of their siblings”\textsuperscript{33}.

\textsuperscript{31} MORCOWITZ S., “Patongo Community Survey Report”, Jubilee Action, February 2013
\textsuperscript{32} Passion 4 Community, “Psychosocial Report – Third Quarter”, 2013
\textsuperscript{33} The World Bank, \textit{Ibid.} p.2
Passion 4 Community’s support, through both psychosocial counselling and facilitating enrolment in income generating activities, has proved successful in addressing the particular needs of the youths suffering from extreme poverty as a result of the conflict. A recent example of this can be illustrated by the assistance provided to a young girl aged 14 who was struggling to take care of her 5 siblings as a result of the loss of her parents, who both died of alcoholism following the conflict. When the psychosocial team initially intervened in this case, the girl was found to be extremely traumatized by her overwhelming responsibilities and she was suffering from a feeling of complete isolation. Weekly visits by the dedicated counsellors helped her feel supported and gradually encouraged her to seek reintegration with other community members. In early 2012, she was referred to the emerging livelihoods programme in order to enrol in a tailoring class. P4C noted an immediate improvement in her perception and outlook of her situation: she reported a sense of relief and hope, which was visually recognised in her intensified efforts to cultivate her land in support of her family. This further emphasises how the perspective or hope of increased income can indeed mitigate psychological distress experienced by war affected youths living in extreme poverty.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR P4C AND OTHER COMMUNITY BASED SERVICE PROVIDERS IN OFFERING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO REHABILITATING YOUTH IN A POST CONFLICT ENVIRONMENT

The experience of community-based organisation Passion 4 Community in Patongo illustrates that, in order to effectively increase the well-being of children and youths affected by conflict, interventions should be based on structured psychosocial assistance that addresses both trauma and poverty induced factors of anxiety. Through its implementation of a wide range of interventions including individual counselling, community advocacy and economic empowerment opportunities, P4C has the potential to develop a comprehensive response to the needs of war-affected youths.

However, the successful implementation of a systematic integrated approach is also challenged by the variety and complexity of experiences encountered amongst the community. The practical delivery of P4C’s psychosocial programme must continue to address the root causes of vulnerability of each beneficiary through a comprehensive extension of its case management system which is essential in addressing these concerns.

Further to this, P4C recently started implementing a Child Status Index (CSI)\textsuperscript{34} with a view to assessing the individual needs of the Child Headed Households and plans to extend its use to other vulnerable youth’s groups of the community throughout 2013. Through a review of each child’s well-

\textsuperscript{34} MEASURE Evaluation, “Child Status Index Made Easy”, October 2008
being in 6 different areas – including but not limited to psychosocial and financial security – the CSI can support the delivery of an integrated approach: by prioritising areas of concerns and measuring progress towards meeting these needs in reference to both psychosocial and economic support.

Rather than advocating for a shift in focus from trauma-orientated intervention towards the development of livelihoods opportunities, the experience of P4C suggests that both are equally vital and indeed interlinked in order to help war affected youths reconstruct both their mental and social capital and ultimately, their psychological well-being.
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Life After the Camps: The Truth Commission, Children and Youth Rehabilitation in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Children and youth are among the most vulnerable groups affected by violence in conflict or massive abuses of repressive regimes. If breaches of basic human rights become the norm in a society, a child’s daily experience of education, family, and play can be torn apart, leaving them acutely vulnerable to physical harm, psychological trauma, displacement, recruitment by armed factions or other forms of exploitation. In the aftermath of societal upheaval, the voices of children and youth are often absent from peace negotiations and subsequent transitional processes. In Kenya, after the post-election violence of 2007–08, a truth commission was established to examine not only the immediate violence but its root causes as well. It has made a conscious effort to address the experiences of children and give them voice in the proceedings.

Through their focus on the testimony of victims of atrocity, truth commissions provide acknowledgement and recognition of suffering and survival to those most affected. This paper is therefore an analysis of the children and youth narratives on how they feel about what happened to them and how they state has treated their pleas and how the truth commission plans to address their narratives. I use the case of children and youth groups and their treatment regarding potential reparations benefits to explore the challenges involved in combining a human rights agenda with issues of historical interpretation. The data will be obtained from TJRC offices in Nairobi and analysis done to establish the experiences of the youth and children in post-conflict situations.
INTRODUCTION

Contemporary warfare has increasingly targeted civilians, leaving children exposed and vulnerable. Children growing up in the midst of war become the victims and witnesses of war's atrocities. Not only are they caught in the crossfire of wartime violence – massacred, injured and forced to flee from their homes – but they are also targeted precisely because of their vulnerability as children, becoming the direct victims of conscription into armed groups, torture, rape, and slavery (Carpenter, 2007: 155–182).

In numerous conflicts, children have taken part in hostilities as fighters, cooks, porters and messengers. In some cases, they have been forced to commit atrocities against their own families and friends in an effort to destroy the children's moral sensibility and cut family and community ties. Thousands of children have been targeted for the worst possible violence and abuse. Most of these violations have been committed with impunity.

Historically, the most widespread internal displacement in Kenya occurred in the year 2008 - during and after the post-election violence (PEV). While internal displacement has been a permanent feature of Kenya's history dating back to the colonial times and increasingly between 1992 and 2002. These internal displacements of people periodically took place, after the elections sparked mainly by political rivalry. However, the internal displacement after the announcement of the 2007 presidential election results were unprecedented in terms of the number of victims and the widespread nature it had in many parts of the country. The violence resulted in families and communities being forcefully evicted from their homes both in urban and rural areas (cf. Bazemore, 1999). According to the government 350,000 people were displaced from their homes during the period of two months after the elections. There was an almost equal number of people who were sheltered/hosted by family and friends after the displacement (GOK, 2008). According to the UN the number of people displaced as a result of the December 2007 post-election violence was 600,000 by February 2008. In the BBC news on 22nd February 2008 the Head of the UN emergency relief operation, John Holmes, said that about 300,000 displaced people were in camps, with the same number living elsewhere. Among these people approximately 100,000 were children. During this violence, women and young children faced the worst kind of violence as they were raped, denied access to school and their future put at stake (Shriver, 1997).

Despite its regional power status, Kenya has been unable to sufficiently marshal its enormous human and material resources to achieve a lasting political stability, economic growth and sustainable development. Since independence, the country has witnessed an extensive and disturbing history of politically motivated ethnic conflicts, massive displacement of people, killings and assassinations. The Kenyatta, Moi and even Kibaki states have presided over shocking and sometimes brutally effective record of inhumane laws, harassment, imprisonment, torture and other forms of oppression to terrorize, silence or otherwise neutralize those in opposition to the establishment (GOK, 2008). Sadly, while such state perpetrated atrocities have been committed against citizens, there has never been any form of official acknowledgement or even apology. For long, Kenya had been ruled by regimes which have had no respect for human rights, the rule of law, social justice, transparency, accountability and other trends of democracy. For these reasons, the three presidents presided over numerous extra judicial killings that were executed as the police and Intelligence Service attempted to get rid of non-state sanctioned gangs. It is against this background that a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) was established in Kenya to uncover the colonial problems of land grabbing, massacre; the immediate post-independent frames of assassinations, as well as the late independence skeletons of state killings, the `ethnic clashes` and economic scandals (cf. Mandani, 1999).

Today, nations throughout the world are coming to terms with their pasts; Europe with its colonial history, America with its dark past of slavery, South Africa with apartheid and Germany with the scars left from two totalitarian regimes. Kenyans too, are increasingly becoming anxious to know `what happened and why`; `who did what to whom`; what constituted injustice and why. This means that by placing bare a report on historical injustices, TJRC would herald a new dispensation in Kenyan history. Kenyans will not only know what constitute the truth in Kenya's dark history, but also demand that such truth(s) be address through collective apology, compensation, reconciliation and/or repairing past injustices. This would further provide an opportunity to address broader social problems by setting out a factual record and making policy recommendations in a way that educates the public about the issues.

36 Hirst, Megan, and Ann Linnarsson, `Children and the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste.

37 For further discussions of the Truth Commissions, see for example, Kim Pamela Stanton, `Truth Commissions and Public Inquiries: Addressing Historical Injustices in Established Democracies`, A Thesis Submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Juridical Science, Faculty of Law, University of Toronto, 2010. She argues that truth commissions are distinguished from other commissions of inquiry by their symbolic acknowledgement of historical injustices, and their explicit `social function` to educate the public about those injustices in order to prevent their recurrence. p. ii
IDPs, TJRC AND REHABILITATION

War, conflict and natural disaster inflict a terrible toll on children and the young. While the UN and international NGOs work with communities to protect children from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence and to nurture, there are many other local initiatives that are invoked to develop their potential through innovative education, livelihoods and skills-training programs. Children and youth are extraordinarily resilient.  

Generally, the most revealing theme that emerges from these narratives is that IDPs are questioning the constitutional promise that a Kenyan can live, settle and establish a home in any part of the country. For IDPs the reality of their displacement mirrors the opposite and raises the critical question of the government’s ability or lack of it, to implement the Constitution. On the other hand, IDPs living in camps constantly express feelings of neglect. They single out the government for not doing enough to provide them with the support to re-build their lives. The IDPs feel that it is important to identify themselves as a distinct group whose needs warrant specific attention because they were the victims of a deliberate policy targeting them for displacement and forced relocation (Nosworthy, 2007).

The three prominent IDP camps in the country and created transitional homes are spaces of emergent communities of marginalized identities within the nation. Yet, the marginalization emboldens individual members to understand personal experience as grounds for action and social change. As found out in a different study:

The FSH found that IDP settlements at Jikaze and Vumilia are spaces of an emerging local “discursive threshold” where IDPs narrated, discussed and examined their status. Jikaze and Vumilia are transition camps which stimulate acts of remembrance as well as offering its members a newly valued position from which to speak and to address their togetherness and identity.  

Through acts of remembering, individuals at the so called Jikaze and the communities of the Vumilia take time to narrate alternative and counter-histories as people who come from the margins, yet their narratives also include other kinds of subjective identities such as: the tortured, maimed, raped, the displaced and overlooked, the silenced and the unacknowledged. (Mwakio, 2011). Their stories reflect new forms of identity in which their future has been radically altered. The interviews

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reveal that people who are affected by political violence and find themselves in the camps as IDPs are almost always the poorest and disadvantaged members of the society. (Baxter, 2005:120–135).

These are people who have not benefitted from the bright future delivered to others Kenyans from the prosperity of independence, the development of capital and the power and authority of the state. When IDPs tell their stories they narrate a part of their lives; a part which needs to be heard by a wider audience.

Living in the IDP camps has provided these Kenyans with an opportunity to speak about their communal identities in the face of loss and cultural degradation. In the midst of the dislocation, the IDP’s personal and collective narratives have become ways in which they claim new identities and assert their participation in the political sphere. As well as this, individuals and groups of IDPs also engage in critically demonstrative and narrative acts in which they assert their cultural difference and right to be different. In the camps and transitional settlements IDPs struggle to leave the past behind and embrace their newly experienced collective subjectivity.

Life narratives of the IDP’s also provide ways in which they imagine the security of a common past in the midst of its fragmentation and the pace of change of the present. For them, memory is a metaphor for a broader uncertainty about how to frame the past; their narratives of personal remembrance becoming ways that they know the past differently in the present. In most cases, storytelling has functioned for the IDPs as a crucial method of establishing new identities of belonging (directed towards the past) and belonging (directed toward the future). Their stories undermine the common and unified narrative of national belonging.(UNHCR, 1999).

THE NARRATIVES OF MISSERY: TJRC AND CHILDREN STORIES

Section 27 of the TJRC Act provides that the Commission may put in place special arrangements and adopt specific mechanisms and procedures to address the experiences of women, children, persons with disabilities (PWD), and other vulnerable groups. The Special Support Unit of TJRC is one such institutional mechanism established within the organizational structure of the Commission to ensure that the experiences of these vulnerable groups are consistently and adequately addressed in all the processes of the Commission. In this regards, several presentations were made by children calling for an end to negative ethnicity, corruption,

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exploitation and other ills facing the society and country at large. Most witness recounted her experiences at the hands of the security services:

I was 14. I was involved in an accident. Then a policeman volunteered to take me to hospital but instead took me to his house, and raped me. He later took me to the Kenyatta National Hospital, where I was treated. After being discharged, I reported the matter to the police, but no one made a follow-up, because the perpetrator was a Commissioner of Police..(TJRC/TESTIMONY 01).

Another witness recounted her harrowing experiences, after she had been violated sexually:

I was defiled and conceived last year in Nyeri. When I delivered, I reported to my father. He went to the police, who referred him to the Children’s Department, which referred him to FIDA, and finally to CRADLE, who eventually assisted me. I got a baby boy, who is now with my sister. I attended school while pregnant. The authorities were not aware, until when I went into labour…. (TJRC/CHILDREN/TESTIMONY 02).

The third witness, a 14 year-old from Kisumu, also recalled how she had been sexually molested:

I was twelve, when it all happened. As a boarding student, I was on my way home, when a man told me to go to his house, where he would give me water to quench my thirst. After a short while, he undressed. When I asked him what he was doing, he threatened me, saying that he would kill me if I told anyone about the incident. He had a knife. He let me go after the act. I felt so much pain when I got home. I never told anyone about it. I returned to school, where I was taken to hospital. My sponsor later returned me home, called my mother, and told her I was pregnant. Asked who had impregnated me, I was scared stiff to open up. A friend who visited me got a beating from her mother, who christened me a prostitute who was spoiling her child. This hurt me so much…. (TJRC/CHILDREN/TESTIMONY 03).

A local NGO by the name CRADLE narrated the experiences that young children went through. Its spokesperson explained how girls were trafficked to the Coastal cities of Kenya for sexual prostitution. CRADLE acted in their legal defense in the justice system, in cases such as when children are held in remand in breach of the Constitution and the Children’s Act. They also recorded cases of child sexual abuse by police officers (UNO).

During the post-election violence, CRADLE carried out a national survey and set up a desk in Nakuru. Its results indicated that 54% of the population in camps of the displaced in the first quarter of 2008 were children, while 26% were women. The survey showed that hundreds of children were murdered in the post-election violence, with boys killed to end generational continuity while women and girls were raped to shame and emasculate their men. At least 100 children died on this account,
while 18 years-olds were killed because they seen as adults. Some died from random police shots.
The report went on to indicate that:

Three of those who died in Kisumu on this account were children. In cases of sexual abuse
during the violence, 80% of the victims were children, and 90% of them girls. Child labor was
used in political campaigns, such as to barricade roads. Cases of child-led households and street
families are now common, as a result of the violence. (Baxter, 2005:120–136).

A World Health Organization (WHO) study has shown that children play outside while their mothers
have sex for money to sustain livelihoods. Children are also used to sell illicit brews, thus being
exposed to drinking sprees. Cheap videos in slums expose children to pornography and violence.
There’s need for policies and laws to govern this. Children are also born in a cycle of poverty, and are
thus vulnerable to social ills. TJRC documented sporadic demolition of shelter and informal
settlements, and this had emotional impact on children. In this case, the state should provide
culturally sensitive housing and physical planning to enhance social amenities for children to learn
ethics practically.41

Many children dropped out of school for lack of school uniform, among other needs, and as
a way of rehabilitation, extra cost need be waived for poor children. While extension of study hours
and unnecessary tuition limited creativity of children, a systemic syllabus reforms to churn out
thinkers and enhance ethical values would be necessary. A 14 year-old male from Kiambaa
recounted his experiences in the infamous church inferno at the height of the 2007/8 post-election
violence:

As you can see, I was burnt on my hands, thigh and feet. It all happened on January 1st, 2008.
Some people came and broke the door of the Church, and set the building on fire. We didn’t
know where to flee. I attempted getting out, which is how I got the burns. Born in the area, I
was in Standard Seven during this incident. My mother and I suffered tremendously during the
violence. I can’t do anything when I remember the day. I start shaking, sweating and just feel
....I lost four friends in that incident. They were burnt to ashes. I ask the government to take
care of their graves, because the site is now overgrown with weeds. After staying away from
Kiambaa for two and a half years, I went back to a house built for us by the International
Organization for Migration (IOM), but it still does not feel like home. My mother was adversely
affected. She no longer hears clearly, and trembles a lot. I ask the government to give me a job,
so that I can help her. She’s now 65. Our relatives did not help us, and they have abandoned us.
I also do not know my father....(TJRC/CHILDREN/TESTIMONY 05).

41 See, for example: Nosworthy, David, ‘Children’s Security in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding’, Discussion Paper,
In the procedures of narratives, children are asked to describe what happened to them in great detail, paying attention to what they experienced in terms of what they saw, heard, smelled, felt, the movements they recall and how they felt and thought at the time. Initially, the session is distressing, but as it is long enough to allow habituation, distress levels diminish towards the end and more and more details are recalled. It is through such methods that they get to speak out and heal from the wounds created.

As previously indicated, memory and amnesia play a central role in the (re)construction of all national collectivities; however the power of these driving impressions takes on extra effectiveness in post-conflict societies which have to antagonize the legacy of mass inter-communal violence and attempt to heal the wounds of the victims of violence in order to avoid future conflicts. Historical over-emphasis on the past violations of one’s community can result in a victimhood mentality that serves to neglect responsibility and excuse current acts of violence against others.

CONCLUSION

The narratives presented here (and in appendix to this paper) by children are suggested as analytical devices that could be used by policymakers to explore conflict situations. These narratives are representations that take into account the epistemic uncertainty that attends violent conflict; they offer a valuable perspective for analyzing representations of conflict situations. There are suggestions that violence defies explanation, that sometimes testimonies of experiences of violence can be marginalized or silenced and also that the experiences of violence can shape social subjectivity. These narratives present how violent conflict as explained and articulated by the IDPs in Kenya produced effects that merit further inquiry on the conflict.
Challenges and opportunities of political reintegration of former child soldiers in Colombia

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ABSTRACT
This text discusses how the political dimension of reintegration is related to the success and sustainability of the process of reintegrating children that were recruited by illegal armed groups in Colombia. The design and implementation of the public policy that promotes the reintegration of this population should include the political dimension of this process, a factor that is usually overlooked. Otherwise, we might miss the opportunity to strengthen the social and political potential of these young victims and positively impact other aspects (such as economic, psychosocial and community well-being) of a complex human process. The argument is based on the results of the author’s Masters thesis in Political Science at Los Andes University (Colombia, 2011).

Keywords: reintegration, child soldiers, Colombia, politics, recidivism.

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In Colombia just around the corner anyone comes and (tells you)
‘Hey, I’ll give you 200 dollars per month just take this arm and look after this spot’.
And you are unemployed. Don’t know where we’ll end up, especially me.

Former child soldier demobilized from
the United Self-defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) paramilitary group

This is how many children and young people demobilized from illegal armed groups live in Colombia42. They undergo a process of reintegration in the midst of an on-going armed conflict. They are surrounded by a partial but significant conflict and humanitarian crisis43 facing the demobilized population that also presents a high dropout rate from the reintegration process and recidivism levels (CNRR, 2010). These youth can be recruited again, enter into criminal networks44 and utilize the skills they acquired in the past (CIDDR, 2009). This makes reintegration more likely to fail. Within this context it becomes a challenge to transform young child combatants into democratic and peaceful citizens, removed from illegal activities and violence.

The sustainability45 of reintegration –according to this paper– depends, among other factors, on how their political reintegration process is understood, designed and implemented. This political process – related to participation in decision-making and local and national power structures (Veale, 2003) as well as in policy design and public debate46 (Guáqueta in Berdal and Ucko, 2009) – besides guaranteeing some of their rights, can also be a mechanism that contributes to ease a complex transition and transformation. It will help them find a new role that is essential to keep them away from violence. Overall, it will help the Colombian state in meeting its duty, and the challenges in reintegrating this key population to break the cycles of violence.

The next pages present (I) a brief reflection on what is known about the process of reintegrating former child soldiers in Colombia (II) the purpose and method of the qualitative research that supports this text, (III) a description of the former child soldiers that were interviewed, (d) and four arguments that show the link between the political reintegration experiences of the former child soldiers and their perceptions of sustainability. This article seeks to provide input to understanding

42 A child soldier who leaves an armed group before becoming 18 years old is considered a victim in Colombia. Otherwise is considered a perpetrator.
43 Affected them as their families by homicides, illegal detentions, forced disappearance, threats, forced displacement and illegal recruitment.
44 As happened in El Salvador and Mozambique.
45 A process is sustainable if the child does not go back to an illegal armed group.
46 Through think tanks, non-governmental organizations, journalism and the public sector (Guáqueta in Berdal and Ucko, 2009).
how we can reinforce the conditions for sustainable reintegration processes, from the perspective of those who have left the Colombian armed groups while still children.

THE REINTEGRATION PROCESS OF FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS IN COLOMBIA

Colombia is the country with the fourth largest number of children involved in an armed conflict (Defensoria del Pueblo, 2007). Children have been recruited throughout history, yet Colombia is one of the few countries where their demobilization has been hidden on a massive scale (Sierra, 2009). Some children have managed to leave the groups, but the actual number is unknown, as is the current status of many of them. In 2010 the National Government acknowledged to the United Nations Organization (UN, 2009) that “the only thing we can say with certainty” of child recruitment is that since the establishment of the specific state program and public policy for this population in 1999, 4,252 children left illegal armed groups up to February 2010. This small group has been treated under an institutional model that “neither is nor is intended to end” (ICBF, 2010, p. 23-24) and is actually being revised.

Outside the state program, people do not know much about the results and sustainability of the processes dealing with children and youth. Additionally, monitoring and following up of these programs has been highlighted as a gap. On the other hand, since both monitoring and tracking are determinants to achieve the effectiveness of interventions and to improve them (Stark et al., 2008), there is a lack of strong data to estimate how effective the State intervention has been and how the Colombian State and the society can improve it.

Formally the program seems adequate, but professionals and practitioners point out that even though it has improved in the past years, problems still remain. A few years ago an academic research report stated that the program’s goals were not met because of the way institutional care services were delivered (Marino, 2005). Such research from Colombia has focused on the programs and recruitment, but little attention has been paid to the return of this population to the dynamics of the conflict (ODDR, 2009), nor to their political participation (Obando y Otalvaro, 2009).

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73% are boys and 27% girls, mainly from the FARC (2,410 children), the AUC (1,042) and the ELN (622).

According to Alvaro Villarraga (personal communication, 2011), who was DDR coordinator at the Reparation and Reconciliation National Commission until 2011, initially there was no follow up of this population and even though it has improved, it has not been enough. Public servants consulted agreed that the monitoring and follow up system is very week.

The program goal is to contribute and support the consolidation process of the path of life of children and adolescents demobilized from illegal armed groups, under the guarantee of their rights, construction of citizenship and democracy, with a gender perspective and a focus on social inclusion (Conpes 3554, 2008, p. 34).

Obando y Otalvaro referred to young people.
**What we know about political reintegration in Colombia**

While it is clear that DDR is "essentially a political process" (CIDDR, 2009, p. 8), the definition of reintegration according to the United Nation's Integrated Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, on which the Colombian National Policy for social and economic reintegration of persons and armed groups is based, lacks a political dimension. The model of reintegration for children has never had a political approach in Colombia (Rubio, personal communication, 2011).

Although the ICBF program seeks to strengthen citizenship, participation and "real democracy" (ICBF, 2010, p. 38), the relationship of these children with the state, for example, is poorly mentioned in the program guidelines. Also the guidelines contrast with the actual institutional practices which lack participation\(^{51}\).

These previous lines confirm what has been highlighted: children and youth have participation or political needs that are often overlooked (McEvoy-Levy, 2001). They see themselves as social actors and often as political actors capable of succeeding (Maulden, 2007). Finding a social and political role for former combatants in post-conflict environments "if it is not more, it is at least as important as the opportunities of employment and education". That is why “the issue of reintegration should be seen through a political lens rather than a purely technical one” (Özerdem and Podder, 2011).

If interventions fail to engage former child soldiers in meaningful ways in decision-making structures (participation) in post-conflict situations, it is more likely those peace efforts will fail (IDDRS, 2006). According to that lens, we can understand why the participation of former child soldiers impacts the viability of sustainable peace, even if it does not guarantee it (Maulden, 2007).

This is why, according to UN standards, children and youth should be involved in the peace process and in developing policies and programs for their rehabilitation and for their communities. In the case of adults, exclusion (no participation) among other factors has the potential to have an impact on recidivism (Nussio, 2009) and to politically destabilize a country or a region (IDDRS, 2006).

Former child soldiers soon become young former combatants. They are considered the most difficult group to reintegrate appropriately and one that imposes greatest risks for peace. It is also the largest group of potential contributors to the economy and to the reconstruction of a country (Specht, 2006).

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\(^{51}\) Maulden, 2007; Estrada et al., 2006; and professionals consulted in the research.
THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND THE METHODS USED

*We can build on theories or Western concepts for proper treatment or we can listen to children, and try to understand what can be more effective to meet their needs.*

Yvonne Keairns, 2004

Taking into account the complexity of the experiences of reintegration, the author designed a series of three interviews based on the Dolbeare & Schumann model (Schumann, 1982 in Seidman, 2006). It has been rated as "ideal" to reconstruct details of experiences in the context they occurred (Seidman, 2006). The three questionnaires were designed to answer the following research question: *how are experiences on political reintegration of Colombian former child soldiers related to the success and sustainability of their process?*

The experience of political reintegration is understood in this paper as the experience and individual learning (also sometimes collective) of children, associated with participation. It includes what they have experienced and the knowledge they have in terms of their rights and legal authorities (including those related to the reintegration route) as well as their knowledge and relationship with the state and its programs, and with illegal armed actors (that might work as illegal authorities). On the other hand, the perception of sustainability was established in terms of the situations that have made them consider returning to conflict and actually doing it, and the reasons they have found to stay in civil life.

Their experiences are seen as a continuum that begins when they left the groups as children and can cover two state programs: Specialized Attention Program runs by the ICBF for demobilized children under 18 years old (hereafter, ICBF Program) and the Colombian Agency for Reintegration Program (ACR Program) which provides reintegration services to those over the age of 18, where they continue and finish the reintegration route.

In relation to these subjects a heterogeneous sample of seven young Colombian former child soldiers from rural and urban regions – currently two women and five men – participated in in-

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52 This study focused on three forms of participation: (a) opinion and decision making in their reintegration process, (b) participation in politics (elections and power structures), (c) participation in the Colombian reintegration process and in peace building.

53 ACR attends demobilized adults and former child soldiers when they are over 18 years old. It uses the same model for adults with specific measures for former child soldiers.

54 Given the limited sample size of the young people interviewed the study does not analyze the results with a gender focus.
depth interviews. These youth joined the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia guerrilla (FARC, 3 youth), the National Liberation Army guerrilla (ELN, 1 youth who was also part of FARC and AUC), and the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia paramilitary group (AUC, 3 youth). They were recruited between the ages of 7 and 15 years old and spent between 3 months and 10 years in these organizations. They left the groups between 2002 and 2005, age from 15 to 17 years old. They were interviewed for this research a few years later when they were between the ages of 21 to 25 years, in Colombian cities (Bogota, Medellin and Barranquilla), where they were attending the state program, studying and working informally.

Thirty-two (32) hours of interviews were recorded, which allowed collecting the voices of these seven young former child soldiers and the establishment of complex stories, rich in details and illustrative of their realities\(^\text{55}\). These narratives were systematized and analysed with the support of \textit{Atlas.ti} software. It was also complemented with other sources like newspaper articles, academic studies, official and independent documents, as well as interviews with public servants and experts on the subject. Since it was a qualitative study, the findings are not quantified.

**THE FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS INTERVIEWED**

Upon entering the armed forces as children, they already have had a relationship (or a lack of it) with official authorities and organizations outside the law. Some had relatives working in illegal activities. The reasons they gave for having joined the conflict are varied and include: economic difficulties, domestic violence, family problems, revenge for displacement\(^\text{56}\) or because parents had died. Only one was abducted, while another did not understand that he was joining an armed group, but when he found out he decided to stay. None of the interviewees joined the groups for ideological reasons.

Once in the groups they played roles as “carritos”\(^\text{57}\), took care of household tasks (cooking and cleaning), participated in combat and used explosives (in some cases without previous training), took part in intelligence, recruited children and adults, were snipers, provided guard and made health-related tasks (such as giving injections and serum). Only one received political education accompanied by discussions and readings within the FARC. Some received instruction, but mostly associated with group rules and principles of what they called “social equality”. They recall bad and good times in the groups. Some even saw their future in these illegal organizations.

\(^{55}\) They were asked about their previous experiences, the way they enter to the illegal groups and their experience with them.

\(^{56}\) Only one demobilized from the AUC links his decision to resentment because the guerrillas had previously displaced him and his family.

\(^{57}\) Someone who carries arms and ammunitions for illegal groups.
Those who took part in paramilitary ranks report having worked in cooperation with the Colombian Armed Forces. Those who were in the guerrilla mentioned attacking the Armed Forces. After these experiences, their perceptions of the state have continued to shape. The reintegration processes, with or without state support, feed these relationships they have had with the state. As we will see in the next pages, their demobilization and reintegration experience tell us that the political dimension should be taken into account in order to fulfil their needs, guarantee their rights and to strengthen their political and social potential for their own and the country’s benefit.

The young people interviewed perceived their reintegration processes as successful ones, although they have considered going back to the armed groups on several occasions. In some cases doubts still persist, but today they are all in civilian life. They seem to have adapted, with the support of the State (except the two young men who had not received state support so far), other institutions and family and personal efforts. Only two continued in the war: one joined the Army, which is considered by him as “another step in the arms”; and another one (a woman) – after being part of the ELN and the FARC – joined the AUC during her reintegration process.

The comments they make about their reintegration processes are positive, despite difficulties they encountered in civilian life and despite having remained in risky contexts. None said they were worse now; on the contrary, they recognized that they have “got used to it”, have been “lucky” and “found good people”. They feel “life has just opened to them”, they believe they have a “new life” and “a good opportunity”.

THE POLITICAL REINTEGRATION EXPERIENCES AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

As stated in the following lines, the political reintegration of the former child soldiers interviewed is linked to the perception they have about the sustainability of their processes. The four arguments explained are based on the perspective of the youth (former child soldiers) and also take into account institutional documents and academic literature. The text highlights the associated reasons they have found to consider, doubt and actually act on dropping out of the programs/not entering them, or going back to an armed group/illegal activities/violence. Also the reasons they have found to stay in civil life are mentioned.

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Always the guerrillas or paramilitaries put in your head the idea
that the government is lying and that if you surrender they kill you or imprison you.

Young demobilised from the AUC
According to the interviewees, distrust of the state and ignorance about the reintegration route and the programs can lead child soldiers to skip attention or consider leaving the institutional path. Distrust and ignorance are interrelated and create a vicious cycle for former child soldiers in Colombia: lack of confidence in the State prevents them from approaching the institutions, which makes it more difficult for them to know the path of reintegration and their rights. At the same time, ignorance of their rights and the programs makes it harder for them to approach institutions. As the study shows, some of the interviewees did not go directly to the State, experienced exclusion and engaged in other criminal activities.

The young people interviewed made the transition as children from illegal status to civilian life, with distrust of the State and its institutions. This is possibly due to their experiences prior to recruitment, the messages they received in the illegal armed groups and their experiences with the State during the conflict. They left these organizations individually (alone, with one or two companions) or collectively (in two cases), with little or no information about the process of reintegration and the existence of the ICBF program.

Some reached cities and towns after overcoming difficulties and running away from the illegal ranks, an action which may be punishable by death, or after being captured by the Army and held in detention centres they call "juvenile prison". One did not understand why he was separated from adult combatants after mass demobilization and in consequence he thought of dropping out from the formal process.

Three of the interviewees did not directly enter the children's reintegration route. While trying to avoid the program, one was captured by the police and was put into the program. Two of them did it years later, but entered the adult program. One (demobilized from AUC) did not know that he could be part of a program until he was informed by a demobilized adult. The other explained that the AUC commander had informed him that children could not join the collective demobilization. He had a spontaneous reintegration process in which he considered joining another illegal group but ended joining the Army, not telling them (or his family) about his past.

The exclusion of children under the demobilization of the AUC paramilitary group (2003 and 2006), is also an example of how a lack of communication or misinformation about the ICBF program prevents children from knowing the right they have to be part of it. The Colombian State recognizes that children who have not entered a process of restoration of rights, such as they were with the AUC, are often in situations where their fundamental rights are at risk, and they may have continued committing crimes (ICBF, 2010b). It is unfortunate that the State has only started finding these
children that were excluded from demobilization in January 2010, seven years after the collective
demobilization processes.

It is clear that children who make up the illegal military ranks require information—at least the
knowledge that there is a reintegration program and they have the right to receive individualized
attention, as victims, as part of a public policy. They need to know about the existing participation
mechanisms in which they can participate (Chaux, 2004). Entering the program is one of the earliest
forms of participation by former child soldiers once they have left the groups.

On the other hand, the Colombian State must counteract the distrust, ignorance and confusion that
characterizes children when they leave the illegal ranks. Since their attitude serves as a factor that
affects the possibility of a first contact with the state and also can intercede with the rest of the
process. As discussed below, it can also lead them to make the decision to leave the path of
reintegration. This results in a lack of recognition of children (Keairns, 2004). In practice they lose
their rights as victims and miss out on policies designed for them, perhaps without even knowing it.
They miss the opportunity to obtain tools, knowledge and support to effectively become citizens, as
the National Reintegration Policy seeks.

This difficulty imposes major challenges that the state will have to address if it wants to control the
negative impact that may result from the exclusion of these children. According to the Integrated
DDR Standards, governing the National Reintegration Policy, the exclusion of disengaged young
people can make them feel alienated, creating the opportunity for re-destabilizing activities (IDDRS,
2006).

Having the state support in reintegration is entirely appropriate since children require support in the
transition to civilian life to reduce the propensity to use violence as a means to meet their needs and
continue the cycle of violence (Wessells, 2006), which counters to democracy and peace building.
The young people interviewed confirmed this: some of those who did not enter the program recall
that they needed help, and those that joined the ICBF program appreciate the support of the state
as one of the reasons to remain in civilian life and not return to arms.

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A fellow from the ICBF Program ran away,
maybe because they do not clarify things very well to us.
Former child soldiers from AUC

Confusion, distrust of the state and ignorance remains in the interviewees even when they have
spent more than eight years attending the programs. They do not seem certain about what really
comprises the institutional model of children and young adults and the duration of it. According to the youth interviewed this can be detrimental to the sustainability of their processes. It has led them to consider returning to weapons. Further, the information gap can be filled falsely by saboteurs, such as illegal actors, in order to influence the demobilized children and youth.

Confusion on the route of different kinds was reported. The youth might be very interested about their rights even if they know very little about how to access to them. One of the boys interviewed noted this: "This program is more variable than an equation. Then you sometimes hear yes, sometimes no. They reinforce some things to some people and not to others. Maybe it's to create confusion. Who's lying here?".

Not knowing exactly what the program covers, can reinforce the distrust of the state, generate wrong expectations, and further frustration. A young woman said that she had been promised a productive project for several years and the delay bothers her. She said she wanted to leave school and the program. In her case, this situation could jeopardize the sustainability of the process, because in the past she interrupted her reintegration and turned to activities associated with drug trafficking and entered into a third armed group\(^58\).

All have doubts about the path of reintegration and their rights but are afraid to ask and therefore rarely do so. "I have not dared to ask [how long I will be in the program], so I would not be seen as the one that asked". It is noteworthy that none mentioned consulting printed texts, books or documents relating to the legal route, their rights and the associated authorities.

They agree on a practice: they informed themselves about their rights and the reintegration route via what they see in their peers or what they are told by others. This seems to have negative implications on their processes and can even negatively affect their trust in the State.

The other day a message spread. All demobilized people have to spend 26 months in prison. I said I will not spend two years in prison. I'm going to the bush. These things make you doubt, you do not know if they are really playing with the right card\(^59\).

In the difficult task of supporting these children, now young adults, to enter a different life path, it is counterproductive that these third parties distribute misinformation about the process. Peers misinformation and rumours that are generated may affect the sustainability of the former child soldiers processes in Colombia (Campo and Almario, 2007) and may affect the youths’ relationship

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\(^58\) It is important to consider that she might have been using the researcher to transmit a threat to the program.

\(^59\) This has also to do with a change in the demobilized adult route. Former child soldiers have different laws.
with the state, a relationship that is already quite complicated.

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In general, although the relationship with the state has improved, according to the testimonies of these young people, most have experienced disrespect and aggression from authorities.

The group of youth that was studied reported having friends and family in state security agencies. They seem to have adapted well and some say they feel "normal" towards security forces and even look to them when necessary. One of the young men – who was linked to the AUC and was excluded from the collective demobilization – decided to enter the Army as a civilian, not reporting his past.

In some cases the youth experienced abuse from authorities as a result of their past. The youth expressed "anger" and "resentment" against these outrages. One took legal action against a police officer, but decided to withdraw it for fear of revenge from the policeman, who had also pushed the youth not to report him to the authorities.

The findings confirm that there are high levels of mistrust between "demobilized" persons and the security forces (Munevar and Nussio, 2009, in Nussio, 2009 60) as well as other institutions in Colombia. Although the literature recognizes the need to foster a better relationship between ex-combatants and the State, the ICBF Program Technical Guidelines (ICBF, 2010c) does not mention it.

Although some interviewees are more critical than others, in general all recognize some positive aspects and are able to assess what institutions like the ICBF, the ACR, the Mayor of Medellin, individuals from these institutions and others have done to support and encourage them to continue in the path of reintegration.

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_I was never asked. Everything is set. You make part of a chess party._

_You are a piece. One was moved as they (the ICBF) wanted. It was more like a policy of an armed group. The only difference was that there were no weapons._

Young demobilized from the FARC

The young people consulted want, and need, to participate in their processes of reintegration. However, ignorance and misinformation regarding their rights (including participation) and the fear of the authorities may restrain them from giving their opinions and making decisions in their own

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60 For adults, but as we see it happens with children too.
processes. This ignorance and fear can exclude them from exercising their right to participate in their reintegration processes, which also is advisable to strengthen their own processes and to positively impact the viability of sustainable peace. Although respondents reported some participation, they also highlighted their great interest and unmet need for participation in these processes.

The perception on how they have participated in their processes of reintegration is heterogeneous: there are complaints as well as acknowledgments of personal gain, even from the same individual. They feel that they could not and cannot give their opinion in the ICBF and ACR programs but they also value the fact that they have been able to make decisions such as where to study and live. Some even think their comments have led to changes in the programs. Others report having considered escaping the institutions because they felt that they could not voice their opinion or make decisions.

Overall, the group sees their participation and their views being taken into account as necessary and logical. An interviewee, new to the program, reveals his perspective on this exclusion: "Here (the institution) come many important people, but they do not talk with the demobilized people but with the teachers. I do not know why. Teachers have not been at war and we have. They do not ask us what we want, what we need".

As it is stated in international literature, the demobilized have participation requirements that are often overlooked (McEvoy-Levy, 2001). Consequently, as indicated by the standards of the UN DDR strategies that are designed to address them may have limited impact. Also the state loses the opportunity to obtain "vital information" based on the real needs that the youth have and the tools that have worked to remove them permanently from violence (McEvoy-Levy, 2006).

Participation is a right enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Colombian Constitution and ICBF and ACR documents (including guidelines). Even the construction of a citizenship approach stated by the ICBF Program conceives the right to participate which "implies that adults consider the voice of the children as proposals on equal terms with other social actors (including the state)" (ICBF, 2010, p. 29). In practice there appears to be a significant gap since this is not performed, according to the experiences of the youth and other people interviewed, as well as in previous research (including Marino, 2005, Estrada et al., 2006, Maulden, 2007)61.

In general, young people tend to be excluded from social and political processes and institutions (McEvoy-Levy, 2006, p. 41), and in Colombia tend to have little involvement in public policies (and Otálvaro Obando, 2009). However, if this happens with former child soldiers we might miss benefits

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61 das CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICT – KAMPALA 2013 | 116
associated with participation such as increasing interpersonal trust (Putnam, in Public Opinion Project, 2005), hope and resilience (McEvoy-Levy, 2006). These are benefits that are necessary for victims of recruitment in Colombia. Also, according to the youth interviewed, they have considered dropping out of the ICBF program when they have felt they cannot give their opinions or make decisions.

*I lived my experiences and I know I can do something for other people, for other children that may be at risk of recruitment, for those at home experiencing abuse. I believe that I can build peace in that environment and in that space.*

Young demobilized from the FARC

In all of the children’s stories the individuals have prevented other children, youth and adults from entering into the armed conflict, even though they have considered going back to conflict themselves at certain times. They reported strong interest in helping children who are just entering the ICBF program. They feel their knowledge and learning can be helpful to others.

This has to do with the ability to self-regulate and regulate others that Julian Aguirre (2011, personal communication), the then ICBF Program Coordinator, has identified. It also refers to the desire to care for others and to do something positive with their lives (Keairns, 2004) and shows us that the youth can see themselves as social or political actors capable of succeeding (Maulden, 2007).

Thus, one of the young people interviewed, newly admitted to the ACR program, feels that if he becomes a professor, he may help children from his town "to correct their courses" so they do not do what he did. "For as I thought about winning the war, now this will be my weapon to counter the war somehow." The same boy feels that he left behind "the life he led" to do something "good", but that has not been easy. "If you came from there to become someone better, someone who wants to help others, to do something for his country, and they do not give you tools and work, then how can you help?"

Only a girl reported having worked with demobilized young women. This work has done much to strengthen her own process as a woman since she realized that she could tell her story and feel no pain. She was afraid to talk about her experience in an academic seminar, not for fear of an illegal armed group but for fear that public servants would take action against her62. In the past she felt threatened when taking part in a research team that was working on reintegration, along with other demobilized people.

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62 After the research she was dismiss from the ACR Program. People believe it was because of her participation in the seminar.
Professionals who have worked with demobilized children and youngsters consider that the State perceives the participation of demobilized people as a threat. Consequently, they do not identify support and promotion opportunities for participation, but in fact the opposite. There have been situations of estrangement from this population and a lack of dialogue that alienates young people from the knowledge and exercise of their rights, and that goes against of the process of building citizenship.

This is an opportunity and, according to the young people consulted, it seems the State is not taking advantage of it. The group reported little involvement in the Colombian reintegration process, despite the great willingness and potential they may have to influence the peace-building efforts. Involvement of this population has shown good results abroad (McEvoy-Levy, 2006). It could be a measure affecting several components of a comprehensive reintegration. If it is related to a job, it would impact on other areas such as employment, economic, as well as political and psychosocial wellbeing.

Overall, the current programs lose the opportunity of using the political participation of young people as a peace building mechanism at four levels: (1) militarized identities could be transformed which may foster resilience and prevention violence, (2) authorities could acquire authentic information about young people’s needs and the appropriate means to fulfil them, (3) compliance with the right of participation of children and youth which is also a practical manifestation of a human rights culture, which needs to be built in Colombia. And finally, (4) participation would be an actual practice of power sharing that could facilitate sustainability of peace agreements (McEvoy-Levy, 2006).

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_I have never voted. It seems to me like a silly vote_

_Some do it for the money, because they sell their vote._

Former child soldier from FARC

The transformation of child combatants into citizens includes an insertion into the democratic and legal system, which involves participation in elections and power structures. The young people interviewed reported low turnout and show little interest in getting involved in these spaces. This may reflect a type of self-exclusion, which, as we have seen, is not helpful in making the transition to

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63 Although there have been periods of participation from civil society organizations (as Coalico, Benposta, War Child) and at the program.
The youth talk about recent political events proving to be informed and to have an understanding about what is happening in the country. However, this does not mean they have strong political knowledge. "What is democracy? I do not understand the question", said one interviewee. For one of the young women the electoral system is so foreign to her that she believed the country holds elections every year.

The study shows very few cases of electoral and political participation. The youth consulted have had no experience in politics, except for a girl who spent a year working at a local Mayor’s office. Two of the youths say they want to be members of a political party. None of them have participated in manifestations or protests.

It seems the programs are missing the chance to make former child soldiers feel involved in the decision-making process of the country. This possibly leads to the youth not having a sense of political inclusion, a factor that is positively associated with the sustainability of reintegration (IDDRS, 2006). While in Colombia and Latin America overall, participation of youth in elections is low, and this population is also not very involved in public debates and institutional spaces (Reguillo, 2003 in Hainault, and Pinilla, 2009). The fact that former child soldiers do not participate in the democratic system is also a form of self-exclusion which must be avoided.

What children have experienced in the conflict makes it essential to include them in decision-making. Those who enter the illegal armed groups have had a particular socialization process in which participation is indisputable (Aguirre, 2011, personal communication64. Switching from an active role to "political marginalization" can threaten the sustainability of their processes (in the case of adults) (Buxton, 2008; Gomez et al., 2007, Nilsson, 2005; Zartmann, 1995; in Nussio, 2009). In the case of adult ex-combatants, the literature links recidivism with lack of political participation and other contextual factors (Nussio, 2009).

CONCLUSIONS

[Children and] young people are participants in politics
and conflict reproduction whether or not
they or adults realize it or not.
Siobhan McEvoy-Levy, 2006, p.166

64 Aguirre gives the example of a former child soldier from FARC who had in charge a group of 32 combatants. Public policy documents also recognizes social participation of combatants (Conpes, 2008).
Based on the group of former child soldiers interviewed and the information gathered, the article concludes that political reintegration is, along with other elements, capable of positively and negatively affecting the perception of the sustainability of the processes of reintegration of children and youth in Colombia. From the point of view of peace building, the findings confirm that the reintegration of this population can not be conceived only in terms of the psychosocial, economic and community well-being, as in the literature and the Colombia's institutional framework. Children and youth require political intervention according to their experiences, needs and potential.

A policy approach that takes into account these elements will answer the participation needs of this population (starting with knowing their rights) that can generate feelings of inclusion, positively affect sustainability, and support peace building. It can also harness the energy and the social and political potential these children have when they leave the weapons. In addition to it being a right and a part of a democratic practice, participation decreases risk factors and strengthens anchor factors. It could also be a gateway to understanding the dilemmas faced by a vulnerable population that tends not to be consulted and it is considered a priority in a post-conflict situation.

The reintegration public policy for children and youth is not complete without their participation. Valuable information is lost and the potential the youth have as peace builders is not taken into account. A potential that benefits them, the sustainability of their reintegration and that can even impact the Colombian reintegration process as a whole.

65 Those elements that allow a demobilized person to be anchored in civilian life. They are contrary to the risk factors.
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Sudan Experience on the Release, Reunification and Reintegration of CAAFGs

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to:
- Shed light on the historical background of Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (SDDRC) which has been established and mandated in January 2006 by the Presidential Decree No. (5). Hence, the SDDRC has become an instrumental mechanism for the implementation of Chapter Three of the CPA.
- Highlight the setting up of the CAAFGs Desk for CAAFG-related activities at the SDDRC headquarters that started to operate in collaboration with (UNICEF), as an international partner for technical and financial assistance for Child Program. Furthermore, the CAAFG focal point has been selected as a member of the committee for child legislation in the National Council for Child Welfare (NCCW).
- Acknowledge the significant step taken by the parties to CPA in regard with their agreement to expand the mandate to include both the DPA (Darfur) and EPA (East) and their political commitment, in spirit and deed, leading to smooth coordination amongst all government institutions concerned, and the spirit of cooperation shown by all civilian and military organizations towards the SDDRC in general and CAAFG Program in particular.
- Finally, having mapped out the developments and landmarks on issues related to CAAFGs, the paper pays special attention to the achievement record, in the areas of release, reunification and reintegration of CAAFGs during the Interim DDR Program (2005-2007) and DDR multi years strategy (2011-2013).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and deep appreciation to both SDDRC and UNICEF – Sudan for their deep concern about Child Rights and Protection and for the serviceable program run by the two organizations in the Sudan in successful partnership with governmental institutions. It is worth mentioning here that the keenness shown by the Program in capacitating those involved in child protection and other related issues, has tangibly reflected in the success of the program.

I would like to thank the National Council for Child Welfare NCCW for the political support provided to the Program every now and then.

Once again thanks to UNICEF- Sudan for constant support given to SDDRC technically and financially.

The SDDRC acknowledges the existence of political commitment, in spirit and deed, leading to smooth coordination amongst all governmental institutions concerned, and the spirit of cooperation shown by all civilian and military organizations towards the SDDRC for implementation of the program.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACRONYMS</th>
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INTRODUCTION

Sudan is the third largest country in Africa. Stretching in an area dominated by the Nile and its tributaries, Sudan borders South Sudan, Egypt, Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Sudan has over 800km of coastline along its north-eastern border, providing access to the Red Sea. Sudan has a tropical south and arid desert in the north. It is generally flat, with mountains in the east and west.

In 2003 and 2004 peace talks were held between the Khartoum government and the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM). Significant international attention was focused on the talks, including the UK as part of the “Troika”, along with the US and Norway. The outcome was the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed on 15 January 2005. This detailed agreement set the terms for an internationally monitored ceasefire, allowing the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) into Sudan, and set out a power sharing agreement, including Sudan People Liberation Movement / Army (SPLM/A) Vice-President, and made provision for national election in five years time. Crucially, it granted southern Sudan significant autonomy for six years, to be followed by a referendum in 2011. In January 2011, the people of South Sudan voted in a referendum to decide whether to separate from Sudan and become an independent state or to preserve unity. An overwhelming majority - 99.83% of voters - voted for secession. On 9 July 2011 the southern region became independent with the name of the Republic of South Sudan. Many of the issues that should have been resolved as part of the CPA, however, the subject of negotiation between Sudan and South Sudan, including how oil revenues should be shared, citizenship, and the disputed region of Abyei remained pending.66

Sudan has not seen the peaceful transition that all had hoped for since the independence of South Sudan. Conflicts have arisen in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States that have resulted in a large number of internally displaced peoples in those areas.

The conflict in Darfur also continues, although violence has reduced recently. International efforts are carrying on represented in UN and AU deployment of peacekeepers as part of the UN-AU hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), in addition to follow-up of the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD).

Outstanding issues with South Sudan on the disputed region of Abyei, border demarcation, citizenship and oil revenues have also led to tensions as well as international concern.

66 Paper presented in 2007 Sudan DDR
The constellation of previous factors along with tough environmental, ecological, social and economic situation as well as fragile security conditions faced by many communities have resulted in spread of negative social and economical phenomena such as children's conscription to defend their own communities, particularly, local communities suffering from long-term conflicts and wars.

**DDR NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005 where CAAFGs was one of the most important issues in the negotiations, a presidential decree was issued in March (2006) forming the committee of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration DDR. Based on the presidential decree, the Government of National Unity and the Government of Southern Sudan established the following:

- National Coordination Council for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration NCCDDR.
- Northern Sudan DDR Commission.
- Southern Sudan DDR Commission.
- Joint Offices in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States.
- Sub-DDR Offices in 11 war-affected States with 9 CAAFGs coordinators therein.

**PEACE AGREEMENTS (FROM 2005 TO THE PRESENT)**

A number of peace agreements were signed throughout Sudan's modern history including direct addressing to ex-combatants and vulnerable special needs groups (SNGs) and here is a list of some of these agreements:

2. Darfur Peace Agreement signed in Abuja, Nigeria (DPA-2006)
3. East Peace Agreement signed in Asmara, Eritrea (ESPA-2007)
4. Doha Document for Peace in Darfur

It is to be noted that the CPA, DPA and EPA include postulates and clauses that uphold specific reference to definite commitments and indicators regarding ex-combatants and vulnerable special needs groups (SNGs), including children associated with armed forces and groups (CAAFG), women associated with armed forces and groups (WAAFG), the disabled and elderly ex-combatants.

**DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE SUDAN SITUATION**

Different factors continued to play central role in indicating the nature of the issues discussed in this paper, however, the most influential can be summarized in:
1. The Sudan is multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country with varied ecological and environmental structure.

2. Agricultural, agro-pastoral and semi-nomadic transhumance forms of livelihoods in many cases are behind long-term conflicts.

3. The country has suffered from political instability most of its history since attaining political independence on 1.1.1956.


**POSITION OF SUDAN ARMED FORCES (SAF)**

The Sudan Armed Forces have repeatedly ascertained the following position:

- That SAF never conscribes children.
- The age of eighteen years is the legal age for enrollment in the SAF.
- The law determines the legal age for conscription and imposes penalties on conscription of children below the legal age of eighteen years old.
- Criminalization of Child Recruitment in Sudan Armed Forces Act was issued in 2007.
- Establishment of Child Rights Unit in Sudan Armed Forces.

**NATIONAL LEGISLATION**

The following legislative measures are to be taken into consideration as part of the efforts devoted to address issues of disarmament, release, mobilization, integration and reintegration.

1. The 1986 Law on the Sudan Armed Forces: Article No.16 stipulates that conscription age is to be determined in accordance with the relevant statutes. The statutes specify the conscription can only take place if the age of the person is eighteen years or more.


3. The 2006 Law on the Sudan Armed Forces (in the drafting stage) specifies that the conscription age is eighteen years; and that violated shall be prosecuted.

4. Child Act 2010 considered the best legislation that effectively addresses and regulates the Child issues of care and protection.

5. Inclusion of important child protection provisions in peace agreements in Darfur and with the South.

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67 NCCW paper on national legislation
COMMITMENT TO INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL AGREEMENTS

To strengthen the process of disarmament and reintegration, Sudan signed number of international and regional agreements including:

1. Sudan adopted and signed the International Declaration on the Rights of the Child.
2. Sudan adopted and signed the Protocol on the participation of children in armed conflict.

POLICIES /PLANS DEVELOPED FOR CAAFGS PROTECTION AND WELFARE:

A set of policies and plans have been promoted to meet the requirements of the programs adopted in addition to facilitating implementation including:

1. Mindful of the need for an overall legal framework for protection and welfare of CAAFG, and advised by the National DDR Strategic Plan (NDDRSP-2007), the CAAFGs Desk (CSD) at the SDDRC applies the strategic vision and principles set forth in the national five–year strategy plan and recognizes the force and relevance of national laws, as well as commitment to international protocols, regional treaties, covenants and agreements as basic references for CAAFG-related policies, plans, programs and projects. The principles set forth in the NDDRSP are considered mandatory, including: national ownership and leadership; working through existing national institutions with justice and equity, transparency and accountability.

2. The National DDR Strategic Plan determined that the eligibility criteria for children to participate in the DDR program shall be considered as follows:

- Is the child under the age of 18 years? Or has the child or youth been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity?
- Children who are solely dependents of adult fighters and of children born to adults or children who are already in armed forces or armed groups.
- Any CAAFG identified before or after the signature of CPA has to be immediately removed from the regular or irregular military structures.
- Specific attention shall be given to girls to ensure that they participate in DDR irrespective of their role in the armed force or group.
- Children – whether combatants or otherwise – may enter the program at any stage and do not need to submit weapons in order to be demobilized and access the program.
- Children need not be pre-registered, possess discharge certificates, or be registered on certified lists to participate in the program.
• Children do not need to formally pass through the generic steps of a DDR program – pre-registration, disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion benefits and reintegration.
• Children shall not be discriminated against on the basis of their region for participation in DDR.
• Procedures to respond to demobilization and reintegration of children from other countries shall be in line with the Paris Principles.
• The SAF and SPLA will not discriminate against women and disabled members who have not been absorbed into their ranks during the alignment process.

LAND MARKS OF GOS PRIORITIZATION FOR ISSUES RELATED TO CAAFG

The following points represent the landmarks of GOS prioritization for issues related to CAAFG:

1. The issue of children associated with armed forces and groups (CAAFG) has been a standing priority commitment of the Government of the Sudan. Starting in 2002, the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) was charged with the tasks appertaining to observance of the welfare of CAAFG.
   a. A special “Department for Peace-building and Conflict Resolution”, was set up at HAC. An advocacy campaign was launched for reorienting and drawing the attention of government departments and institutions, as well as relevant national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to the high importance of sustaining child welfare.
   b. The HAC organized a series of orientation workshops on the welfare and protection of children in especially difficult circumstances

2. While the IGAD peace process was making peace through negotiation in Naivasha-Kenya, the GOS issued the Republican Decree (August 2004) establishing the Interim Subcommittee on the DDR. Issues related to CAAFG were assigned priority status in the mandate of the Interim Subcommittee on DDR

3. In January 2006 the Republican Decree No. (5) was issued establishing (NSDDR). Chapter Three of the CPA protocol on security arrangements stipulates that all children less than eighteen years of age (CAAFG) must, within a maximum period of six months, be released forthwith, reunited with their families and reintegrated into civilian society.

4. CAAFGs Desk, a department created for CAAFG-related activities at the SDDRC, started operating in collaboration with UNICEF, the international counterpart for the technical assistance and the funding agent for the program.

5. CAAFG focal point is a member of the committee for child legislation in National Council for Child Welfare.
6. Lessons learned from positive developments in implementing the CPA inspired the GONU to expand the mandate and coverage of the SDDR to include both the DPA and the EPA domains in its operational plans and programs. The overall plan for NSDDR intervention in the DPA domain has been designed, including, through joint meetings and collaborative efforts with the Mini-Minawi faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM). The basic reference for this joint plan for SDDR intervention in Darfur takes root in article (29) of the DPA which stipulates that specific reintegration programs be developed to benefit disabled ex-combatants, CAAFG and WAAFG. Accordingly, rapid preparatory intervention plan was set up for the three states of Darfur in collaboration with UNICEF.

PARTNER GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

The DDR Program for CAAFG is planned and implemented in association with many partners:
- In this context, the CAAFG program activities are carried out under the supervision and close monitoring of the SDDRC, in collaboration with UNICEF, relevant military and semi-military foundations, and relevant Government Ministries, including, to quote just a few: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of International Cooperation, Ministry of Labour and Management Reform, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Defense, and Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs. They play an important role in bringing the national and international support to the program. Other ministries and public sector agencies, as relevant, will be included in the program.
- Military and semi military foundations, as partners to the SDDRC, include the SAF, SPLA, popular defense forces, national security and intelligence, public national forces, and armed groups in the West and the East. These military institutions are committed to providing demobilized combatants, issuing their data, including CAAFG and SNGs, as well as gathering such groups targeted for all DDR-related processes and activities. In respect of collaboration with SSDDRC/SPLA, as envisioned in the CPA, smooth coordination at senior levels regarding “Joint Operation on CAAFG” cases from Wau and Bentiu. The joint effort resulted in the release, family reunification in the North and reintegration, as shown in table number 1 below.
- The Media are considered independent partners at all stages of the DDR program. In addition, national civic organizations are also partners because they play a fundamental role in relation to constructing national unity and they include national NGOs, community-based organizations, trade unions, community-leaders and civil society groups.
- As for international partner organizations; the UNMIS has been mandated through Security Council Resolution 1590 of 24 March 2005 to provide technical and material assistance to the DDR process through the national bodies as promulgated through the CPA. UN acts as an interface between the international donor community and the national DDR program. UNDDR unit
comprising of UNMIS, UNDP and UNICEF take the lead from UN side to support the process. International NGOs, in participation with national NGOs, will also be partners in the implementation process.

**CHILD DDR PROGRAM: AN OVERVIEW OF THE DDR PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN:**

The National Reintegration Strategy for Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups details the goals, objectives and process for working with children and guides the Program.

**Goal**

The goal of the National Reintegration Strategy is:

“To support the reintegration of children associated with armed forces and/or groups through a process which enables children to transition from life in a military environment into civil society and enter meaningful roles and develop identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities. Reintegration process aims to ensure that children can achieve their rights, including formal and non-formal education, family unity, dignified livelihoods and safety from harm”.

**Objectives**

Reintegration program for CAAFG have the following objectives:

- Support demobilization practices that will facilitate the reintegration of children associated with armed forces and/or successful armed groups - including actor and enhanced screening, outreach, and the search for the reunification of families and alternative care arrangements;
- Strengthen mechanisms for social work for children associated with armed forces and/or armed groups of returnees, such a systematic follow-up to help children to be reintegrated with their families and communities, and assist them in obtaining the required services;
- Support the overall implementation of the projects for the reintegration to facilitate the reintegration of children associated with armed forces and/or armed groups and other vulnerable children, including the provision of psychosocial support, and education, formal and non-formal education, and skills training opportunities to make a living.68

**Process**

There are three options on how children would return to communities.

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68 CAAFG reintegration strategy
**OPTION A: formal process of DDR.** The plans for this were for the armed force/group to disarm the child and then for there to be a registration process. This would take place at an event set up for this purpose and would include the following steps:

- On receiving a list of children to be released from the Security Arrangement of the SDDR Commission would plan for a Registration Stage.
- The SDDR Commission consulted with communities on where to set up the Registration Centre.
- The SDDR Commission with UNICEF support would inform families of the children and invite them to attend. Transport was provided where required.
- Children would be brought to the centre by the armed group who would formally hand them over to primary care givers or the local authority.
- The SDDR Commission, MoSA and UNICEF would verify the children. If a former combatant was found to be over 18 years they should be referred to the adult DDR process.
- All children at this stage went through a medical screening, received an awareness raising session on HIV/AIDS and were registered by social workers for reintegration.
- Any child who did not have primary care givers at this stage would be cared for in accommodation provided for young people in need of temporary care whilst their families were located.
- Following this event social workers would later visit children in their homes to assess the children and plan for reintegration support, and thereafter have the responsibility to follow-up.

**OPTION B:** If children have already returned home, the SDDR Commission will go to communities to inform children and families of the planned registration event and plan for appropriate transportation. Thereafter will follow the same procedure as Option A.

**OPTION C:** If children fled/escaped from their captives/armed group, the SDDR Commission with the support of its partners will register those children in the ongoing reintegration programs at their respective areas of residence. Children will be placed in the interim care center during the time of family tracing. A medical screening will be done prior to their reintegration.

**Target groups**

- Children Associated with Armed Forces or Groups CAAFG.
- Children at risk of recruitment (Children of IDPs, refugees or street children).
Key Activities of CAAFGs DDR:

CAAFGs carry out the following activities:

- Release children from armed forces/groups.
- Link children with their families and communities.
- Prevent child’s (re-) recruitment.
- Reintegrate children socially and economically into civilian communities.

Operational Phases of CAAFGs DDR Program:

Operational phases underlying the scheme are:

- Preparatory stage (Awareness - Enlightenment - Advocacy).
- Verification stage.
- Registration stage.
- Transitional stage.
- Tracing and reunification.
- Reintegration stage.
- Monitoring and Evaluation.

Release (Registration) and Reunification:

The following methodologies are adopted to access target groups:

1. Reportedly two of the early groups of children to be registered followed the pattern as described in Option A above as a formal demobilisation, with children being brought to the site by the Commanders of the armed group and being handed over.

2. Since 2009 most releases have been of Option B model. For the majority of children the armed groups provided the list at a point when the children had already been released and were indeed already in their family homes. The SDDR Commission would go out to communities to identify children and plan with community leaders for a location to hold the verification/registration event. Children would be brought to the event site and the process described in the National Reintegration Strategy would be carried out in the following manner:

   - Verification of children.
   - Medical Screening.
   - HIV/AIDS awareness session.
   - Registration.

3. At the end of the above process children would return to their communities.
4. These events aimed to ensure that children being released from armed groups were well received, provided with initial appropriate support and returned to their communities. In the year 2012, there are children who fled from the armed groups surrendered themselves to SAF and later handed over to NCCW. SDDR Commission facilitated the reintegration of these children with the support from UNICEF as of option C described above.

**Verification of age**

- The age of each person was less than 18 years old, on 9 January 2005 (Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), will be entitled to release unconditionally
- In case where the child's age unknown, or there is a disagreement about whether a person is under the age of eighteen, the age of the child will be estimated or medically examined by a specialized physician.

**Disarmament**

Be delivered any arms or ammunition or other military equipment that are in possession of the child to the commander of the unit, regardless of child's access to these weapons, and regardless of the ownership of weapons and ammunition when the child enrolled in armed forces and groups.

**Family tracing**

Depending on the situation of the individual child, a three pronged approach to tracing had been developed. Additionally the ICRC had agreed to facilitate tracing if they cannot be found through the proposed strategies or if cross border.

Transfer and reunification of children with their families is the responsibility of DDRC and its partners including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Children, who can leave to their homes on the same day, are allowed to do so as soon as possible, while the children who need longer period to finalize their travel arrangements, they are allowed to spend a few days in temporary housing before returning to their homes.

The cases of children that their return requires to cross the borders, their reunification is coordinated between North and South DDR Commissions for the DDR process.
Registration, release and reunification operations for CAAFG\textsuperscript{69}

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Month /Year</th>
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\textsuperscript{69} Program data base
Reintegration

The return of children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFG) in Sudan is not new, over the years, about 20,000 children left the armed forces and began a new life in their communities.

Reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups remained a challenge in Sudan due to conflicts, limited resources, and expansion of the geographical area, but the previous practices have provided several experiences for a comprehensive reintegration process. The DDR Programs maintain the desired balance between ensuring support for the returning child, and working with communities to support CAAFGs and other vulnerable children in a comprehensive way that is free of stigma. This has been achieved through the establishment of a follow-up mechanism for returning children where social workers visit children to ensure that they are linked to community services. The pivotal thing in this process is the effective management information system which tracks the progress of children, monitors the re-recruitment, and identifies the gaps in order to provide a better level of service and establishes child protection network. CPN some training was given to members of Child Protection Networks to strengthen the protection provided to children at the community level.

The reintegration program was planned to be focused on social workers assessing, advising and supporting individual children to get them back to school or involved with livelihood opportunities. However, whilst the focus was on children who had been released from armed forces or groups it was to be an inclusive process so as to include other vulnerable children from within communities. This would ensure that there was no resentment towards one particular group of children, ensure all children formally or informally released receive support and additionally will enhance services in these communities.
Children receiving reintegration support would be visited by their social worker to ensure that the children have opportunities and receive appropriate reintegration support. The National Strategy provides guidance on case management and a suggested schedule for social work visits. The Strategy advises paying particular attention to girls to ensure that programmes are tailored to meet their needs.

DDRC sought to ensure and confirm that children who had previously enrolled in the military groups they are not be subjected to any form of discrimination during the reintegration process and through intensive training and continued observation by the social workers who provide the children with psycho-social rehabilitation.

In order to help children assume the civil roles and so as not to be subjected to re-recruit, DDRC worked in cooperation and coordination with its partners to enroll children with formal and informal education and provide them with opportunities of training to gain life skills and abilities equally as other children who have been exposed to the same and received by the communities.

**REINTEGRATION OPERATIONS FOR CAAFG:**

The overall objective of reintegration activities is not only the family reunification of CAAFG but also follow-up and monitoring of progress achieved in each case, by trained social workers.

To date there have been 2317 (2148 boys and 168 girls) children have been registered for the reintegration activities under the several peace agreements including Comprehensive Peace Agreement; Convention on the Peace in the East, Darfur Peace Agreement.

This has provided an indicative framework for the strategic development of interventions and reintegration programs in all parts of Sudan. Sudan has endorsed the Paris Commitments 2007 to protect children from recruitment or unlawful use by armed forces or armed groups. Sudan is committed to adhere to international standards with regard to children associated with armed forces / armed groups, including the rules and guiding principles of Paris Principles and Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards.

Although the renewed conflict in the regions of South Kordofan and the Blue Nile States hindered functioning of the Program as required, but the DDR existence has contributed to the receipt of a number of children fleeing conscription camps and reunited them with their families and reintegrated them into the ongoing projects in their areas of residence.
Challenges Facing the CAAFG reintegration

The most significant obstacles hindering work of CAAFG are:

1. Extreme difficulty in determining strict numbers of CAAFG in Sudan;
2. There are too many children in the country facing extremely difficult circumstances, including IDP-children, street-children and children affected by armed conflict. The difficulty is how to distinguish CAAFG from other categories in such exceptional circumstances, there is always an abundant supply of candidates for conscription as CAAFG.
3. The role of custom and tradition that inspires children and youth to participate in armed conflict not only for protecting their own community, but also to show courage as a noble value of the local community. The social treatment of boys who returned from the armed groups at times as heros pose a threat for the prevention of recruitment and re-recruitment.
4. The process of reintegration requires substantial, and sustained funding support.
5. Development of a UNICEF strategy on the reintegration of CAAFG that could be harmonized with the country’s strategy, plans and programs for same.
6. Non-government controlled areas had no support and at the current time no active implementation is planned for the children due to security and access restrictions resulting many number of children from the armed groups who are non-signatory of peace agreements, left without any registration in to ongoing reintegration programs.

Management of the Program

As stated above the programme is managed and coordinated by the SDDR Commission which therefore plays a central role in ensuring the programme meets the needs of children who have been released from armed forces or armed groups. Whilst staff of the SDDR Comission do not have a function to provide direct activities at field level it is imperative they provide effective co-ordination, are aware of field level activities and provide leadership in the institutional management. Staffs at State level have a good understanding of their role, implementing in often difficult circumstances and are to be applauded on their achievements to date.

Information Management

The SDDR Commission with UNICEF technical support manages a database on children who have returned to communities. The database is based on individual cases and has the capacity to do analysis of children involved in different activities.

The central database is in Khartoum with each State holding appropriate database with the plan to send monthly updates of the data to Khartoum. The database accessible to the user reasonably
and it has the ability to manage cases and analyze data. It has been developed to ensure its full capacity and quality of reports and interpretations.

**Monitoring & Evaluation**

Monitoring of the different aspects of the program has been taken seriously by all stakeholders in the DDR Program, and reports are provided on a regular basis to partners and donors.

Non-governmental organization Assessment format, as an implanting partner covers individual children well but does not really provide sufficient analysis of the community level involvement; this assessment can only facilitate a limited evaluation of the program implementation. The FPDO organization indicators and the analysis shared with stakeholders enabled a clearer understanding of the program at the centers and were very encouraging.

The SDDR tool on Monitoring and Evaluation is excellent; however coordinators in the field have not been trained on this tool. Whilst this was the case in North Darfur, the coordinator had approached the monitoring in a thorough and logical manner, and in fact had met the expectations in the monitoring.

Reintegration program and psychosocial support in general is challenging to determine verifiable indicators.

**Lessons learned**

1. Participation of child in the project activities resulted in involving children in perspectives and informed the intervention strategies.
2. Use of local languages and dialects helped to ensure communicating the community awareness raising messages.
3. Psycho-social support delivery in the schools has contributed to children mobilization to the education facilities.
4. Poverty is the mother of all evils.
5. Increasingly realized that child protection actors cannot work in isolation with other actors such as livelihoods, education, peace building, etc.
6. Long term between the release and reintegration may create difficulties in accessing the target children.
7. Develop a regional mechanism to put pressure on armed groups to stop recruiting/recruiting children.
8. Apprenticeship training and income generation projects will help protect the children from joining armed groups.
9. Planning for demobilization should include both demobilization and reintegration process, including preparing the staff and establishing partnerships.

10. Effective use of community leaders will facilitate the accessing to CAAFG.

11. Enhance the interim period care of children through the community leaders before reunification.

12. Socio Economic reintegration will restore the bond of family and social responsibility towards the child and gives back the child’s being.

13. Community-based networks are essential for sustainable support to released child soldiers and for reaching those stranded in cross border.

14. Planning for any skills training and livelihood support activities should be preceded by a technically sound market analysis.

15. Apprenticeship training requires careful planning; a structured curriculum for the achievement of specific, measured levels of key skills over a specific period of time; and monitoring of the progress and safety of trainees.

16. Zakat chamber\textsuperscript{70} plays big role in supporting the vulnerable families.

17. Spreading the culture of volunteerism in the communities help in strengthening the activities for the Protection of Children.

18. An exit strategy should be designed at the beginning of any program.

19. Gradually exit help sustainable monitoring of child soldier among the MOSW.

\textit{Towards the Future}\textsuperscript{71}

\textbf{An outline of the vision for a Prevention and Reintegration Program:}

- It is recommended that projects covering the key elements in the current program are established in communities, either where children are likely to return to or where there is the greatest risk of recruitment.

- It is suggested that vulnerable children and families are identified for inclusion in the program but that there is sufficient provision and flexibility to integrate children who are released from armed forces or armed groups.

\textsuperscript{70} Zakat (Obligatory Charity): Zakat is an obligatory act ordained by Allah (The Glorified and Exalted) to be performed by every adult and able bodied Muslim. It is an important pillar among the five pillars of Islam. Zakat is a part of the wealth and property that Muslims must pay annually, to help the poor of their community. One of the main purposes of Zakat is to keep those who are wealthy clean, monetarily, from sin. It is a form of Sadaqah (charity) which is obligatory on Muslims

\textsuperscript{71} Report of CAAFG strategy review
Release and Reintegration of children recruited or used by armed forces or armed groups:
- Once a child is home and has been assigned a social worker, assessment and appropriate support can follow in the manner as for other vulnerable children in that community. To provide this in vulnerable communities identified may require additional service providers and indeed it is beneficial to have diversity rather than overwhelm one NGO, who indeed cannot possibly cover all vulnerable communities in one State.
- One NGO working with a community does not have to provide everything but can look towards making referrals to other service providers.
- The partners involved in reintegration should be extended to become a truly inter-sectoral and inter-agency program to meet the varied and complex needs involved.

Coordination and Technical Guidance:
- To provide a quality program with a range of actors requires good coordination and this might be the role of the SDDR Commission and / or through the Child Protection Working Group.
- It is strongly advised that an international staff member with strong experience in child release and reintegration program is deployed to each State.
- Additionally it is recommended that a specialist be engaged on the issues of child sexual gender based violence in conflict settings, and that the following be considered:
  - To work closely with communities to gain an understanding of how best girls who have been used sexually by armed forces or armed groups can be helped to reintegrate into communities.
  - To advise on specific sensitization work to address this issue.
  - To recommend program strategies that would enable these girls to move on with their lives.
  - To advise on how to support girls who have babies and to ensure that these children in turn are not stigmatized.

FUNDING
Government and NGOs should look beyond UNICEF, currently the sole donor, to support the program. If this is designed in a coordinated, innovative and imaginative manner this could be an attractive program for donors.
Understanding the remembrance of collective violence: from symptomatic suffering to socio-cultural process

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we explore memory processes in war-affected areas. Collective suffering caused by violent conflict has often been individualized and medicalized throughout dominant models of posttraumatic stress in both assessment and clinical trauma care, reflecting a poor understanding of the social, political and cultural determinants affecting how trauma survivors deal with the consequences of organized violence. By means of the identification and problematization of some central assumptions regarding the notion of remembering from the background of critiques on the predominant model of trauma assessment and care, we propose a broader understanding which acknowledges the relational, political, moral, and culture-specific dimensions of remembrance and forgetfulness. Moreover, it is argued that next to disclosure, silencing and forgetfulness can equally function as adaptive ways of dealing with atrocity. Our findings might initiate a reconsideration of psychosocial and educational practice with war-affected families.

Key words: collective violence, trauma, PTSD, memory, disclosure
INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, the number of ethnic conflicts and wars has increased significantly. Causes of these mainly internal wars are diverse, ranging from unequal access to critical resources over unresolved religious or ethnic conflicts to the enduring presence of repressive regimes (Pedersen, 2002). The fact that most modern hostilities occur within states presents a special risk to young people. Fighting takes place in familiar surroundings and involves acts of extreme brutality, with children and youth emerging as both victims and perpetrators (Boyden & de Berry, 2004). Political violence often targets young people when aiming at the destruction of social cohesion and family bonds (Pedersen, Tremblay, Errázuriz, & Gamarra, 2008), hereby depriving communities of future perspectives and hope. Yet the active recruitment of young people by military units is also an example of how children and adolescents sometimes assume active and sometimes even voluntary roles in combat.

Witnessing violent conflict or participating in war activities is not without consequences. Predominantly, it has been approached from a trauma-centered perspective: war victims are said to suffer from posttraumatic distress, a psychiatric illness which is characterized by the back-and-forth intrusion and avoidance of trauma-related memories and mainly treated by means of a phased trauma rehabilitation model (Herman, 1992). In predominant trauma treatments, the disclosure of painful memories and their integration into a coherent life story plays an important role. In this paper, we will start from this observation that memory is at the center stage of both the symptomatology and the clinical treatment of trauma. Yet this trauma paradigm has become subject of strong criticism. From the background of these critiques on the predominant model of trauma assessment and care, we identify some central assumptions regarding the notion of remembering. This will eventually lead to a broader conceptualization of what remembering and forgetting in a (post-)conflict context comprises.

MEMORY AS CENTRAL TO POST-TRAUMATIC SUFFERING

Over the past decades, trauma has become established as one of the dominant modes of representing our relationship with the past (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009). Particularly in approaching the experience of violence and its aftermath, it has become a key concept for scholars and practitioners from various disciplines (Kirmayer, Lemelson, & Barad, 2008). The dominant diagnostic construct of posttraumatic distress (posttraumatic stress disorder; PTSD) and its relation to war exposure plays a central role in research, assessment and clinical trauma care in both Western and non-Western societies (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010).
The diagnostic construct of PTSD was first included in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) in 1980. It has increasingly surfaced as a common psychiatric diagnosis for children and adults who have experienced war and atrocity (Summerfield, 1996). The estimated prevalence of PTSD-related symptoms in war-affected populations varies from study to study, but is usually fairly high. For example, according to one study, 93.8% of children displaced during the Bosnian war were said to suffer from trauma-related symptoms (Goldstein, Wampler, & Wise, 1997). The diagnosis is characterized by three major elements (van der Kolk, 2000): (1) the repeated reliving of memories of the traumatic experience (involving intense sensory and visual memories of the event, accompanied by extreme distress); (2) avoidance of reminders of the trauma, as well as a general withdrawal from engagement with life; and (3) a pattern of increased arousal (e.g., hyper vigilance, memory and concentration problems, startle response).

Remarkably, the interaction between remembering and forgetting is at the center stage of the symptomatology of traumatic suffering. Indeed, an oscillation between remembrance and forgetfulness; between intrusion and avoidance, can be observed. Individuals who suffer from posttraumatic distress relive the traumatic past in the form of intrusive images and thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares and/or a compulsive replaying of the events. At the same time, there is a tendency to avoid activities, places, thoughts or feelings that call the traumatic event to mind, or even an inability to remember important aspects of the trauma. Trauma treatments traditionally ascribe a central role to the disclosure of past events in order to be able to forget, or at least move beyond, the trauma (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). The integration of traumatic memories into a coherent, meaningful trauma story is an important phase in the predominant trauma rehabilitation model (De Haene, Rober, Adriaenssens, & Verschueren, 2012; Herman, 1992) and is assumed to promote the recovery and general mental and physical health of the individual (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; van der Kolk, McFarlane, & van der Hart, 1996; Van Dijk et al., 2003).

Kirmayer and colleagues (2008) appropriately observe that "[t]he dynamics of memory and of attributional processes are crucial for the diagnosis of PTSD because the criteria require that the person remember and attribute his or her symptoms to the traumatic event" (p. 7). Young (1995) also noted the temporal-causal relation between an etiological event and the subsequent symptoms that is essential to the pathology of PTSD. PTSD sufferers relive the past – in the form of traumatic memory – in the present, in the form of intrusive images and thoughts. It is therefore the memories of traumatic events that are said to cause PTSD. Precisely this link between potentially traumatic experiences and memory constitutes the research interest of this paper.
PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTION
Throughout the past decade, the abovementioned dominant trauma discourse – with its central focus on PTSD – has become subject of strong criticism. Various authors (e.g., Fassin & Rechtman, 2009; Kirmayer et al., 2008; Summerfield (1996, 1999)) have noted the important limitations of the PTSD model in capturing the multifaceted ways in which individuals and communities experience atrocity. In this paper, we aim to relate these criticisms to the notion of memory. The question we imply to tackle is what the central assumptions that can be identified from the background of critiques on the trauma-centered discourse regarding the notion of memory imply for our understanding of remembering and forgetting in war-affected contexts. Eventually, this analysis might initiate a critical re-assessment of the central role which is ascribed to disclosure within dominant trauma rehabilitation models.

In order to answer these questions, literature within the fields of psychology, transcultural psychiatry, sociology, anthropology and the interdisciplinary fields of trauma studies and memory studies was critically analyzed. The present study is thus based on a review of literature.

TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF MEMORY
In this section, we will identify and subsequently problematize some central assumptions regarding the notion of remembering from the perspective of critiques on the predominant model of trauma assessment and care.

From individual to relational process
A PTSD-centered approach locates the experience and interpretation of traumatic events in the biopsychomedical realm. Human problems and their solutions are entirely embedded within the heads or the brains of individuals (Kirmayer et al., 2008). Corresponding to this, scholars in disciplines like psychology and neurology usually conceptualize memory as a psychologically constructed, biologically determined, individual human capacity (Keightley, 2010). As mentioned earlier, the central aim of PTSD treatment is helping the individual cope with past events through the narration of traumatic memories. Especially in war-affected countries, this individualized approach is problematic, since most conflicts are associated with wide destruction of the social fabric (Bracken & Petty, 1998). Thus, the dominant lens of trauma studies seems to transform systemic macro sociopolitical forces into a medicalized micro context of inner individual worlds (Blackwell, 2005; Boyden & de Berry, 2004; Brough et al., 2012). However, within disciplines like anthropology and sociology, remembering has since long been interpreted as indivisible from its social context, influenced by Halbwachs’ (1952/1992) concept of collective memory. According to Misztal (2003), collective
memory tends to be understood as “intersubjectively constituted results of shared experience, ideas, knowledges and cultural practices through which people construct a relationship to the past” (p. x). An asocial approach to memory is no longer tenable because the nature of what is remembered is profoundly shaped by “what has been shared with others and that is, moreover, always memory of an intersubjective past, of a past lived in relation to other people” (ibid. p. 6). Memories are shaped by the conceptual structures and processes of groups one belongs to, be it family, peers, or even the nation. Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory has however been strongly critiqued because it does not tolerate the coexistence of conflicting truths and memories within a group (Foxen, 2000; Green, 2004). Indeed, individual memories are often in tension with socio-politically constructed accounts, such as the official narratives created after a collective trauma in order to achieve collective unity (Green, 2004). Creating one shared representation of past violence may not be possible. Despite this pertinent criticism, it is important to recognize that memory is not simply a matter of individual agency, but is rather inextricably connected with past and present social relations (Kirmayer et al., 2008). For example, Zur’s (1999) research in post-civil war Guatemala pointed out that, out of fear, war widows will never publicly express the memories they have of state-perpetrated violence. However, when they find themselves in a small group of confidantes, they will feel safe to share traumatic stories. Besides, older women seem to have greater powers of memory articulation than younger ones.

Thus, instead of situating traumatic memories exclusively in the individual realm, a social reading of the phenomenon is essential in reaching an encompassing understanding of trauma and its remembrance. Moreover, acknowledging the undeniable tension between the public and the private; the collective and the individual, is relevant for a comprehensive understanding of remembering in war-struck contexts.

From neutral to political and moral phenomenon

The psycho-medical model of PTSD tends to import problems into a de-politicized and de-moralized logic of individual emotional trauma (Zarowsky, 2000). Traumatic events are perceived as having an impact on the self and its relationships with others, in isolation from the social, political and cultural context (Bracken, Giller, & Summerfield, 1995). By separating psychological and neurological processes from the broad, intersubjective realm in which people ascribe meaning to their experiences, an illusory condition of neutrality is created. However, Zarowsky (2000) pointed out that communities who try to reconstruct meaningful lives in circumstances of longstanding collective violence interpret war-related distress from a political and moral position. Along the same lines, it can be argued that memories of traumatic events are embedded in a political and moral context. The political functioning of memory refers to “the processes of negotiation about whose
conception of the past should prevail in public space” (Till, 2012, p. 7). Memories are thus understood as relations of power through which people can actively negotiate what has to be remembered and what can be forgotten (Galloway, 2006). In the post-conflict ‘rush to memory’, for example, different actors struggle to promote their version of the war (Eastmond & Mannergren Selimovic, 2012). Furthermore, the recent phenomenon of ‘truth commissions’ in the aftermath of war and human rights violations (Blackwell, 2005) demonstrates that rather than disclosing experiences of suffering in a medical context, survivors seem to have a wish to talk about what happened in a socio-political setting. Another example of a clearly political memory practice in a conflict context concerns a website called Palestine Remembered. One of the purposes they describe in the About Us section of their website reads as follows:

To preserve the memories and the experiences of the Palestinian people around the world, especially the 726,000 Palestinian refugees who were ethnically cleansed from their homes, farms, and businesses as a result of the 1948 war. Currently, the dispossessed refugees number 6.5 million and constitute the great majority of the Palestinian people. On the political front, so far their voices have gone unheard, and we at PalestineRemembered.com hope to amplify their voices in cyberspace.

Thus, victims of ethnic cleansing are encouraged to publicly share their memories, and by doing so the founders of the website hope to make a difference on the political domain. Ashuri (2012) pertinently observed that the growing emergence of digital networked technologies will “challenge the mechanisms society employs to deny memories of immoral acts and consign them to oblivion” (p. 442). She argues that the dissemination of personal histories on an accessible and shareable online network is essentially driven by a social purpose: to expose events that are silenced or denied by the collective. Her perspective clearly appeals to the intrinsic moral concerns that are in play when remembering violent conflict. It can be argued that by testifying on a website, victims, next to being political witnesses, act as ‘moral witnesses’ (Margalit, 2002), which means their testimony is essentially driven by a moral purpose, aiming at raising visibility to the evil they witnessed and the suffering it causes. According to Simon and Eppert (1997), witnessing is indeed first and foremost an ethical act, which includes the obligation to bear witness and subsequently re-testify what one thinks important to remember. They propose the classroom as a possible ‘community of memory’ in which this ‘obligation to remember’ can be worked out. Nevertheless it is important to recognize the emotional and moral strain of testifying to atrocity, acknowledging the struggle between the moral imperative not to forget and the extreme pain of remembering (Eastmond, 1989/1997). Indeed, next to the obligation to remember there can be a moral imperative to silence the violence committed during war. Langer’s (1996) account of Holocaust testimonies is illustrative in this respect: he
suggests that “the Holocaust and subsequent large-scale atrocities exist in an orbit void of the usual consoling vocabulary” (p. 54). Witnesses who disclose painful memories rarely feel liberated: although their experiences can be told, they cannot truly be shared, because what they lived through was without parallel or analogy and beyond human comprehension.

To conclude, it is no longer tenable to conceive remembrance and forgetfulness as neutral processes. In (post-)conflict contexts, memories are often employed in political ways: they constitute power relations through which people negotiate what has to be remembered and what should be forgotten. Moreover, remembering violence and atrocity implies an important moral process: bearing witness to testimonies of evil and suffering encourages one to re-tell and thus to convey what one claims essential to remember – or on the contrary, to remain silent and hence tacitly agree that what happened was too horrible to enounce.

**From symptomatic suffering to non-pathological signs of the past**

A third characteristic of the PTSD model concerns the relabeling of social suffering as a technical problem – ‘trauma’ – to which technical solutions – like psychotherapy – can be applied (Summerfield, 1999). It is thus stated that experiences of conflict and atrocity do not just cause suffering – they are assumed to cause ‘traumatization’, a clinical condition with clear diagnostic criteria. Several scholars have explored the detrimental impact of violent conflict on the mental health of both children and adults (e.g., Barenbaum, Ruchkin, & Schwab-Stone, 2004). Cultural and personal strengths and resources are often minimized or ignored in the intervention strategies the PTSD model employs (Isakson & Jurkovic, 2013). Within this pathologizing logic of PTSD, the intrusion and avoidance of trauma-related memories is understood as symptomatic. PTSD is said to cause cognitive dissonance, making images and thoughts intrude in the present, risking to overwhelm patients, and inhibiting them to speak about their experiences (Van Dijk et al., 2003). Research however clearly shows that war does not inevitably lead to complete destruction of mental and social conditions. Even in precarious (post-)conflict situations, people frequently exercise remarkable resilience and ingenious survival strategies. Therefore, while we do not question the distressful character of post-trauma suffering, which and how memories are employed in the present may also mirror a non-pathological presence of past atrocities. For example, various scholars have documented the hidden strategies of resistance that may speak from the exertion of particular memories (Pendleton, 2011; Sheftel, 2012; Zur, 1999; among many others). Clearly, this closely relates to the political side of remembering and forgetting. The Foucauldian concept of counter-memory, which implies the idea that memory can be used to challenge dominant interpretations of the past that seek to oppress (Foucault, 1977), is often mentioned in this regard. In
Zur’s (1999) account of Guatemalan war widows, it is stated that these women construct a sense of continuity and restore their dignity through the collective reworking of unofficial, secret memories. Counter-memory may thus express itself in the hidden sharing of subaltern narratives, but it may also show in a less literal way through, for example, the use of humor which allows survivors of conflict to express dissent from dominant narratives of the war (Kidron, 2010; Sheftel, 2012). Next to these subtle strategies of resistance, the non-pathological presence of a violence- and conflict-loaded past may also be displayed through the tacit presence of this difficult past in everyday mundane and domestic life, as Kidron (2009) has shown eloquently in her account of lived memory practices of Holocaust survivors and their descendants. She demonstrated, for example, how food-related practices in these families recall the tragic tales of wartime starvation and the critical magnitude of daily bread rations. The practice of eating their daily pieces of bread hereby allows survivors to ritually reenact the moment when they ate “that piece of bread” (p. 15), commemorating the life-threatening hunger and miraculous survival.

Summarizing, these findings suggest that traumatic memories are not always pathological, symptomatic signs of the past. Which and how memories are used in the present may also mirror the resilience, resistance and survival strategies people exercise. The painful past can be transmitted in everyday mundane life without flooding survivors or their descendants with undesired reminders of what happened.

**From universal to culture-specific phenomenon**

A fourth line of criticism vis-à-vis the trauma-centered discourse concerns the universality claim inherent in western diagnostic categories such as PTSD. Although the trauma literature suggests that PTSD has a worldwide prevalence, it is important to be aware of the fact that similar symptoms may mean different things in different social settings (Summerfield, 1999). Pedersen and colleagues (2008) emphasize how different societies and communities have different causal attributions and understandings and distinct ways of expressing emotions and suffering, as well as diverse ways of healing and dealing with traumatic events brought on by political violence and armed conflict. It is therefore important to understand both symptoms and healing practices related to violent conflict within their local cultural context. Illustrative to this point is the case of a Balinese rice farmer who witnessed the massacre of several fellow villagers in the aftermath of a communist-backed coup attempt in September 1965 (Lemelson & Suryani, 2006). The subsequent illness this man suffered from, which manifested itself in symptoms like social avoidance, intentional silence and visual and auditory hallucinations, was never referred to nor experienced as ‘post-traumatic stress’, but culturally explained as a variant of “ngeb”, “an illness caused by witnessing something horrific, frightening, or bizarre . . . as a result of which sufferers put themselves in a self-imposed exile.
characterized by "muteness" (memhsu) and lack of participation in the social world" (p. 402). In line with the universality claim inherent in the PTSD paradigm, conventional models of memory often fail to situate the processes of remembering and forgetting within the specific cultural and socio-historic contexts of their production and retrieval (Foxen, 2000). In these western models, memories are usually postulated as individual but universally similar entities which, if repressed or blocked, may be chronologically retrieved through the therapeutically supported narration of the traumatic event. However, in non-western contexts "notions of self, community, time, history, death, suffering, culpability and fate are often embedded in ontologies differing radically from the narrative and chronotopic conventions implicit in western models" (Foxen, 2000, p. 360). Therefore, an understanding of the notions of remembering and forgetting within their social, political and cultural setting is crucial, as remembering is an essentially cultural process which invites us to be attentive to culture-specific manifestations of and tensions between different memories (Gemignani, 2011). An example of a culture-specific manifestation of remembrance is the case of Quiché Mayan war widows who have the habit to remember through somatization or somatic metaphors instead of directly expressing their emotions and memories as a normative or adaptive response to trauma (Zur, 1996). Whether memories of violent conflict are expressed or not, is thus not only politically and morally but also culturally determined. Indeed, one's culture can influence whether someone feels like disclosing memories of a particular traumatic experience. To go back to the example of the Balinese rice farmer (Lemelson & Suryani, 2006): his intentional silence with regard to the bloodbath he witnessed can be partially explained by the Balinese cultural de-emphasis on the expression of negative emotional experiences and states. In the same line, various other scholars have documented the silencing of traumatic pasts as a culturally influenced strategy (Angel, Hjern, & Ingleby, 2001; Eastmond & Mannergren Selimovic, 2012; Isakson & Jurkovic, 2013; Measham & Rousseau, 2010; Rousseau & Drapeau, 1998), stressing the fact that in some cultures social strategies of silencing can be a way to deal with what happened and to rebuild life. Moreover, the phenomenon of silence can function as a medium of expression, communication and transmission of knowledge that is as rich and multifaceted as speech and narration (Kidron, 2009). For example, in the case of postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina, silence is employed as a pragmatic strategy to communicate respect, trust and the will to coexist despite continued division in the larger society (Eastmond & Mannergren Selimovic, 2012).

Thus, instead of conceptualizing memories as universal faculties which, if repressed or silenced, have to be retrieved through therapeutically supported narration, we propose a more complex understanding of remembrance and forgetfulness within local and cultural contexts. This implies an openness for the very diverse modes in which memory shows itself.
From narrative expression to various modes of representation

Finally, we want to draw particular attention to the predominant focus on the narrative disclosure of traumatic memories, which is presumed to make up an essential part of the healing process (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). War victims are invited to verbally express themselves with the aim of modifying and transforming the painful experiences by reconstructing them into a meaningful, organized, understandable narrative (van der Kolk et al., 1996; De Haene et al., 2012). While trauma rehabilitation models present the narrative mode as the preferred way to bring past experiences into remembrance, there are abundant examples of non-verbal ways of memory transmission. The representational mode of traumatic memories can vary depending on the relational, historical, political, and cultural context. A first example concerns the practice of some descendants of Holocaust survivors to have themselves tattooed with a replica of the Auschwitz identification number of their (grand)parents, as was illustrated in the documentary *Numbered* (2012). This clearly is an example of how the body can turn into a powerful site of memory (after Merleau-Ponty), but also of how remembering is an issue which is continually socially and morally contested: a public debate was held in the international media, revealing various opinions on the practice. While some considered it as a tribute to Holocaust victims and survivors, others condemned it tasteless. The imprint of violence- or disaster-related memories into the survivor’s body has been studied by various authors (e.g., Kidron, 2009; Kleinman & Kleinman, 1994; Pendleton, 2011) who have illustrated the embodied representation of traumatic memory, sometimes literally – as is the case with the Auschwitz tattoos –, sometimes invisibly – as is the case when, for example, war survivors decide to do a memorial walk along the grounds where many victims fell. Still another memory practice we would like to present is an installation-dance-performance named *1979* (2011) which was written and directed by Duraid Abbas. The two main actors of the piece (among which the director himself) were born while the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq was raging around them. With their performance, they testify to the atrocities they witnessed during the war through non-verbal acting, dancing and video fragments. In this way, their memories are transformed into a creative, symbolic representation of past experiences. While various theorists have questioned the possibility of the visual representation of collective trauma – certain cruelties are said to shatter all frames of comprehension and reference and are therefore beyond human imagination and representability (Friedlander, 1992) –, others have stressed the performative function material images, conflict-related artwork and site-specific memory practices can have in their silent act of bearing witness to violence and atrocity (Guerin & Hallas, 2008; Koch, 1989; Till, 2008). Characteristic of these kind of symbolic representations is that often an intersection between private and public histories takes place: the artist intermingles his personal experiences with a public indictment against injustice in
society. In that sense, both a political and moral dimension of the memory practice becomes evident: the artist practices socially engaged work, and at the same time makes an appeal to his public to confront their own witnessing and the responsibilities involved with that (Ashuri, 2012; Till, 2008).

Summarizing, these examples illustrate that the enduring emphasis of trauma studies on narrativity as crucial in memory making can no longer be held on to. There is growing evidence that memories, next to being expressed in a narrative, verbal mode, can be conveyed in non-verbal, silent ways: through the body, through material vehicles, through symbolic performances...

It can thus be concluded that the trauma-centered approach indeed implies a reductive perspective on the phenomena of remembering and forgetting following traumatic experiences of war, conflict and violence. Within this perspective, memories are considered as individual, neutral, symptomatic, universal and verbally expressible phenomena. Yet, there seems to be ample evidence obtained by researchers from various disciplines supporting the need for a broader perspective on memory – a perspective which acknowledges that processes of remembering and forgetting are determined by relational processes; that remembering can be a political and moral act; that painful memories can be non-pathological signs of the past; that remembering is a culturally determined process; and that non-verbal modes of memory representation are just as much employed as verbal ones.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, memory in (post-)conflict contexts is a vast and multidimensional phenomenon which is, despite abundant studies on the topic, still difficult to grasp, let alone define. What we have tried to do in this paper is exploring the relation between potentially traumatic experiences caused by violent conflict and memory. After having described the central role of memory in the symptomatology and treatment of the predominant psychiatric diagnosis of PTSD, we identified and subsequently problematized some central assumptions regarding the notion of remembering from the perspective of critiques on the trauma discourse. This analysis uncovered the need for a broader understanding of memory in (post-)conflict contexts. We proposed a conception of memory that acknowledges the relational, political, moral, non-pathological, culture-specific and representationally variable aspects of remembrance and forgetfulness. This calls for a reflection on the central role ascribed to disclosure in most trauma rehabilitation models. Our findings suggest that the narration of traumatic experiences is to be situated within its local, intersubjective, moral and political context. It became clear that silencing, forgetfulness and non-verbal modes of remembering can be as adaptive and meaningful as disclosing memories. This might initiate a reconsideration of psychosocial and educational practice with war-affected families.
In spite of the booming interest in memory research, much remains to be studied. While memory studies have been successful in providing a space for theoretical perspectives on remembering beyond disciplinary lines, the investigation of everyday practices of remembering remains scarce. Studying these everyday memory practices within their local context may perhaps allow us to explore more in depth the ongoing process of remembrance and forgetfulness. Potential issues to investigate further concern, for example, how children and youth are involved in the transmission of memories; and what are fruitful alternatives for disclosure in the trauma rehabilitation process of individuals and communities.
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ABSTRACT
Children affected by war and armed conflict have become a common phenomenon in Africa. In tow has been the increasing amount of discourse on the effects of armed conflict on children and the process of rehabilitation and reintegration. These discussions have contributed to international advocacy against the use of children as soldiers in armed conflict and their protection. To this extent, a number of leaders of armed groups have been convicted of crimes against humanity. Unfortunately, this has not alleviated the use of children as soldiers or the effect of armed conflict on them. Consequently, processes like rehabilitation and reintegration into communities remain an ongoing process. The following paper identifies a number of issues which can make the process of rehabilitation and reintegration more sustainable and result-orientated. The paper argues that the gaps between different perspectives can be bridged through a framework which includes international and development cooperation, and the rehabilitation and reintegration process. Rather than approach rehabilitation and reintegration as a separate conflict and post conflict reconstruction issue, it is identified as an issue during peace processes. In view of the fact that armed groups have grievances, it is certain that they have been engaged in negotiations with governments. Negotiations often focus on the grievances and may also go as far as including the reintegration of armed groups into the national army. In retrospect, negotiations do not identify as major the rehabilitation and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict. In addition, development partners and international parties who have a prominent role in the peace process through funding and monitoring the implementation of agreements fail to identify and promote the need to protect children affected by armed conflict. Consequently, there is a disjuncture in the role of development partners and international parties in supporting peace processes and rehabilitation and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict. The paper concludes with policy recommendations geared at bridging the role of post conflict reconstruction and development aid in the process of rehabilitation and reintegration.
INTRODUCTION

Africa’s experiences of armed conflict have been as a result of a number of factors including the democratisation process, the clamour for power among groups, shared resources. Although there was a decline of interstate conflict from the 1990’s because of the decline of Soviet Union and its support to pro communist countries and armed groups, most conflict was increasingly intrastate. Indeed, since the 1990’s through to the last and current decade most armed conflicts in Africa can be described as intrastate. These intrastate conflicts are as a result of many factors. As these conflicts became more widespread in Africa so did the use of children as soldiers. Unlike the interstate conflict in which states would engage in conventional warfare using their armed forces, the armed groups forcefully and voluntarily conscripted children into their armed groups to engage in conflict with other armed groups and with the government.

THE USE OF CHILDREN AS SOLDIERS

The use of children as soldiers is not only limited to armed groups but also extends to governments. Francis categories the use of child soldiers as institutional and non institutional. He further identifies various parties who use child soldiers. The institutional parties include the governments, paramilitary, pro government civil defence forces and militia under government control whereas non institutional parties include guerrillas and insurgents, militias, anti government civil militia and defence forces and military juntas.72 The use of children as soldiers by non institutional parties continues to preoccupy studies on the use of child soldiers. There is in addition, discourse on legal instruments that serve to protect children in conflict and prohibit the use of children as soldiers. The instruments however vary in identifying the age limit of recruitment. Indeed, a major lacuna in the protection of child soldiers is the variation in the legal definition and determination of a child. Whereas most scholars and indeed, the legal instruments including the African Charter identify the age limit of recruitment at eighteen years, they are limited in interpretation by cultural interpretations and definitions of a child.

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<th>Instrument</th>
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<td>1) Additional protocol to the 1949 Geneva Convention (1977)</td>
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<td>2) Additional protocol II to the 1949 Geneva Convention</td>
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<td>International Labour Organisation convention (1999)</td>
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<td>6)</td>
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Therefore, regardless of the number of legal instruments to protect children from recruitment, there has been continued use of children in conflict. The following reasons have been identified as hindering the effort at reducing and altogether putting a stop to recruitment of child soldiers. It has been argued that the conceptualisation of a child and childhood is western oriented. Thus the meaning and expectations from children in for instance Africa differ greatly from those of western countries. Therefore in the traditional and cultural sense, African definitions and expectations vary. A second problem is the lack of domestication of international legal instruments that protect children. Next, the regimes have failed to set precedence in indicting groups and individuals accused of using child soldiers. So far, in Africa those who have been prosecuted on account of among other things using child soldiers are the former Liberian president, Charles Taylor and Congolese warlord Lubanga Dyilo.

Needless to say, it would be appropriate to argue that legal frameworks to address the protection of children from recruitment during conflict cannot be relied upon. Rather than focus on only legal methodologies, there is need to cast attention on political processes in the protection of child soldiers. This is important for a number of reasons. Most conflicts in which child soldiers are recruited are as a result of political issues. It follows therefore that they should be resolved using mostly non legal frameworks of conflict management like mediation. During this process, parties can focus on the reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers as a separate negotiation issue. Indeed, peace agreements between parties like the government and armed groups often take into consideration the re integration of soldiers into the mainstream armed forces or re integration into the community. While it is easier to reintegrate and rehabilitate soldiers above the age of eighteen, it is more difficult to reintegrate children, who often return to their communities. Unlike soldiers above eighteen years for whom reintegration into the armed forces is an option, for children the needs are more complex and include a number of activities. Since the child soldiers are separated from their families during conflict, their families need to be traced. This process is supposed to reunite children with close family members so as to create an environment in which they can begin
getting support. Former child soldiers also require formal education and vocational skills in cases where they are unable due to certain disqualifications be reintegrated into the formal educational system. These post conflict activities just like other issues which have been settled and resolved in conflict require time lines for implementation and enforcement. Indeed, parties in conflict and the third parties managing the conflict should ensure that the plight of child soldiers is addressed in peace processes using available tools of conflict management.

PEACEFUL METHODS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

There are a number of methods pursued by parties to peacefully settle or resolve conflict. Article 33 of the United Nations Charter suggests the following methods:

The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice.

Thus, negotiations require parties to engage in discussions to resolve conflict. When a third party directs negotiations, the process becomes mediation. The mediator guides negotiations by assisting parties reach agreements. The mediator may introduce the protection of children and their rehabilitation and reintegration in cases in which children have been used as soldiers. Enquiry involves using a third party in a fact finding mission. This involves carrying out field investigations in the region affected by conflict. This method is often used in situations where reports of crimes against humanity and hostile suspicions are present. As a process, enquiry can be used to identify the use of child soldiers in conflicts. Indeed, enquiry can be an important tool which can be used to support child rehabilitation. A documented account of child soldiers may also be used to assert pressure on parties to stop using child soldiers and indeed be used to indict them as it was done in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia. Enquiry may also be used to put pressure on the international community to ensure that the use of child soldiers is prioritised as an issue.

At times, third parties become informal links of communication between parties. The process of conciliation is characterised by identifying major issues at the centre of conflict. The conciliator also

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74 Article 33, The United Nations Charter (June 1945).
76 Skjelsbaek K., Peaceful Settlement of Disputes by the United Nations and Other Intergovernmental Bodies’ Cooperation and Conflict 21: (1986) 139-154
assists parties in lowering tension and encourages them to negotiate. This method can be used to begin the process of negotiation and to break deadlocks during negotiations. During arbitration, parties may get an authoritative third party to provide a binding judgement by imposing a legal settlement that is considered fair and just.\textsuperscript{77} This method of conflict management is used for issues which can be settled. For instance, land or boundary demarcation or in the settlement of electoral disputes. According to Fisher and Kearshly, additional methods of peaceful management of conflict include consultation and peacekeeping. Consultations include intervention by a team of ‘skilled and knowledgeable’ third parties who set up problem solving workshops in an effort to commence, improve and enhance communication between parties. These workshops encourage them to analyse their relationships. In this method, parties are brought together to discuss conflict. During problem solving workshops parties are isolated from official environments and positions. The workshops are usually convened by skilled and experienced third parties such as the academia or practitioners in the field of conflict resolution.\textsuperscript{78} In addition, peacekeeping can be used to manage violent conflict. Peacekeepers are used to maintain peace and mitigate violent conflict by separating the parties and preventing escalation of conflict.\textsuperscript{79}

Article 33 further suggests that parties may employ other peaceful means to resolve and settle conflict.\textsuperscript{80} Various African communities have identified traditional methods of conflict management which they use to manage internal conflicts.\textsuperscript{81} These methods are characterised by reconciliation between parties; taking responsibility for conflict; confession of crimes committed and compensation of the victims of conflict.\textsuperscript{82} The United Nations Chapter VIII on Regional Arrangements proposes and stresses in Articles 52 (2) Chapter VIII the need for parties to use regional agencies to manage conflict.

\textit{The Members of the United Nations entering into such arrangements or constituting such agencies shall make every effort to achieve pacific settlement of local disputes through such}

\textsuperscript{79} Wall Jr. J. A. & Druckman D., Mediation in Peacekeeping Missions The Journal of Conflict Resolution Vol. 47 No. 5 (October 2003) 693-705.
\textsuperscript{80} See Article 33, The Charter of the United Nations (1945)
\textsuperscript{81} Zartman I. W. Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts: African Conflict “Medicine” (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000)
\textsuperscript{82} For more see Huyse L., Introduction: Tradition-Based Approaches in Peacemaking, Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Policies in Huyse L., & Salter M., (eds.) Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from African Experiences ( Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2008) 1-21
These regional agencies provide good offices to the parties. Consequently, various regions in Africa have employed the use of regional organisations to manage conflict. Because of the conflict dynamics in Africa, the Constitutive Act of the African Union has formulated a framework for the Africa Peace and Security Architecture whose responsibility is to play a lead role in the resolution of conflict. It has further identified through the Common African Defence and Security Policy, sub regional organisations responsible for the resolution of conflict. For instance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has managed conflict in West Africa. Notable examples include, the internal conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia. IGAD on the other hand, has been instrumental in managing the conflicts in Sudan and in Somalia. Indeed, Article 18/AB of the Protocol on the Establishment of IGAD urges member states to ‘preserve peace and stability by cooperating on the pacific settlement of differences and disputes.’

**Forms of third party intervention**

Peaceful resolution of conflict is characterised by intervention of third parties. According to Mwagiru, third party intervention can be categorised as legal or non legal; official or non official. The legal methods include judicial settlement and arbitration, while non legal methods include conciliation, mediation and negotiation. The legal methods of third party intervention are more concerned about bargainable issues and often lead to the settlement of conflict rather than its resolution. According to Goulding, this method of conflict management is based on power. The parties are more interested in either acquiring power or dividing power amongst themselves. Consequently, they reach a settlement rather than the resolution of conflict. The non legal methods on the other hand are intent on resolving conflict and deal more with intangible issues such as needs

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83 The Charter of the United Nations (1945)
84 Wright Q., The Value for Conflict Resolution of a General Discipline of International Relations Conflict Resolution Vol. 1 No. 1 (March 1957) 3-8.
87 See Article 18/AB on the Protocol establishing IGAD
88 Mwagiru M., Conflict: Theory, Processes and Institutions of Management op cit.
90 Ibid.
and values.\textsuperscript{91} Further distinction of the methods and forms of peaceful resolution and settlement of conflict is based on the type of parties and issues at the centre of conflict. When the government is a party in negotiations, it will manage conflict at the official level. At this level, the state uses official institutions such as courts, sub regional organisations and international institutions to settle disputes. In the official level, parties are inclined to bargain and are usually more concerned about power relations and balances between themselves. Consequently, agreements and outcomes that result from this level are usually about power sharing.\textsuperscript{92} For example, the power sharing agreement between the government of Uganda and the National Resistance Movement or between the government of Burundi and armed rebels, or the agreement between the government of the Republic of Rwanda and the Rwanda Patriotic Front.\textsuperscript{93}

The unofficial level on the other hand, attracts different parties and issues. The parties in this process are often non state actors who have grievances manifested as structural violence towards the state and other non state actors. Subsequently, parties in negotiations are apt to resolve conflict because the issues are often non negotiable and cannot be bargained. This level does not concentrate on power relations, but is more concerned with the accommodation of values and the satisfaction of needs.\textsuperscript{94} Third party intervention is determined and influenced by the type of conflict. Given the parties involved, internal conflicts make it difficult to place the management of conflict in one level because of the parties and issues at the heart of conflict. While the government may be forced to settle disputes through power sharing arrangements, other parties may be concerned about the satisfaction of their needs.\textsuperscript{95} Consequently, parties are forced to integrate methods so as to achieve a satisfactory outcome that is beneficial to all parties. Although power is not core to the resolution of conflict, government parties are required to consider the ideals at stake and accommodate each through ‘dismantling the status quo and sharing power.’\textsuperscript{96} In addition, conflict

\textsuperscript{91} Mwagiru M., \textit{Conflict: Theory, Processes and Institutions of Management} op cit. 108.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
Mediation in internal conflict

Mediation is a process of conflict management in which parties in conflict seek assistance or voluntarily accept assistance from external parties to manage conflict. Bercovitch defines it as the entry of a third party into a ‘dyadic negotiation’ process. Mediation involves influencing and changing the parties’ perceptions and behaviour in order to manage conflict. Kriesberg notes that a minimum set of conditions need to be present for mediation to begin. He argues that the external parties must be willing to intervene. According to him, international organisations and alliances of states have an easier chance of mediating because of the leverage, power and authority that they possess. He argues that there is need to situate the conflict within the international environment. Consequently, international organisations intervene in internationalised conflicts. Their intervention mounts pressure on members of the organisations to extend their assistance to resolve conflict. Kriesberg also notes that constituents are important context setters. To him, constituents put pressure on parties to either increase or decrease conflict. The pressure to increase conflict may arise because constituents are dissatisfied. Similarly, constituents may lend credibility and provide legitimacy to the process. There is need therefore for constituents to welcome mediation efforts to resolve conflict. Intervention by the mediator depends on interests and resources available to manage the conflict. A mediator can be an individual, a team of individuals, a state, a regional or international organisation and nongovernmental organisations. According to Bercovitch and Shneider, the mediator represents official parties. Mediators can be individuals ‘appointed by a political authority, usually the president or by a secretary-general to specific peace processes.’ For instance, the Sudanese and Somali peace processes were mediated by special envoys.

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99 Bercovitch J. The Structure and Diversity in Mediation in International Relations in Bercovitch J., & Rubin J.,(eds.) Mediation in International Relations (New York: St Martin’s press, 1992) 1-29.
102 Mwagiru M., Special Envoys in the Management of Internal Conflict: Lessons from Kenya’s Diplomacy of Conflict Management’ Undated
representing IGAD. In addition, individual mediators possess skills, experience and knowledge.\footnote{Dixon W., Third Party Techniques for Preventing Conflict Escalation and Promoting Peaceful Settlement’} Kofi Annan’s experience as a Secretary General of the United Nations, and his experience in the resolution of internal conflicts influenced his appointment as mediator in the Kenyan post election negotiation process.

The next category of mediators are states. Mediators who represent states are appointed based on the positions held or those they currently hold. They also possess resources.\footnote{Bercovitch J., & Shneider G., \textit{Who Mediates’ The Political Economy of International Conflict Management} op cit.} For example, most of the mediators from the United States of America (USA) in the various Middle East peace processes have either served as presidents or are presently presidents or are former or current secretaries of state. For example Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton were mediators in the Middle East processes. Former Secretaries of state James Baker and Henry Kissinger were also mediators in the peace processes. Their position as secretary of state meant that they had to participate in the implementation of foreign policies geared towards the resolution of conflict in the region. On some occasions, states have created coalitions or alliances. These states often share similar concerns and are interested in similar outcomes from the process. In addition, states may invite other third parties to be part of a mediation team.\footnote{Mwagiru M., \textit{Conflict: Theory, Processes and Institutions of Management} op cit.} The Sudan peace process saw the coalition of Egypt and Libya create an initiative at resolving conflict. There was also the coalition known as ‘troika’ which comprised the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Norway.

Institutions and organisations similarly, mediate in internal conflict because of collective interests and obligations of maintaining peace, security and economic stability. There are also nongovernmental associations and organisations which have mediated in internal conflict. Examples include Saint Egidio which mediated the Mozambican peace process, or the All African Conference of Churches which was involved in the unofficial Sudan peace process.\footnote{See Bartoli A. Mediating Peace in Mozambique: The Role of the Community of Sant’ Egidio Crocker C. A. Hampson F. O. Aall P., (eds.) \textit{Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World} (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press) 245-275. See also Mitchell C. R. \textit{The Structure of International Conflict} op cit. 281.}
The functions of mediators

The roles of mediators can be categorised as facilitative, procedural and substantive. During mediation, the mediator is expected to ease communication between parties. Because parties may either not wish to negotiate, are still suspicious and distrust each other, the mediator makes communication possible. During negotiations, parties may use mediators to ease the risks and costs associated with conflict and to weaken domestic rivals through changing the perceptions of other parties. 107 The mediator has procedural roles. For instance, the mediator identifies the venue of negotiations, the number of parties, the agenda, types and numbers of meetings held jointly or separately by the parties or in the presence of the mediator. The mediator also puts pressure on the parties to resolve conflict. 108 These tasks are based on the progress of negotiations. They are key developments in negotiations which contribute to the progress of negotiation. 109 Procedural decisions seek to change the structure and format of negotiations. For example the mediator can introduce norms of behaviour to the process which dictate interaction between the parties. 110 Druckman describes these as turning points in negotiations. These are events which contribute to the progress of negotiations and can include developing agreements or re-opening negotiation after deadlocks or can include the change of negotiation leaders. These events are crucial because they move negotiations from phase to phase. 111 The following moves represent circumstances which create movement towards negotiations. A ripe moment signals the need for parties to negotiate with each other. Parties are said to have a shared desire to resolve conflict. 112

It is however not a guarantee that all parties will reach a ripe moment. It is also not guaranteed that parties will reach an agreement, and if they do, implement it. The mediator can facilitate parties to reach a ripe moment and assist parties to save face when confronted by credibility issues from

See also Druckman, D., Departure in Negotiations: Extensions and New Directions Negotiation Journal (April 2004) 185-204.
112 Hancock L. E. To Act or Wait: A Two Stage View of Ripeness International Studies Perspectives (2001) 2. 195-205
constituents and from their negotiation party. Besides these roles the mediator also assists parties to reach an agreement.

During negotiations parties evaluate their issues with the assistance of a mediator.113 Substantive issues usually emerge from conflict between parties. These are issues which are at the heart of negotiations and reflect relationships between parties. Substantive issues lead to substantive events which are characterised by identifying the key issues and packaging them. Packaging continues until parties are satisfied with the presentation of issues in negotiations. The packaging of issues is complex and requires that parties take into consideration the perceptions of other parties in negotiations. This is so because other parties can question the importance or relevance of issues presented. Most bargaining takes place here because parties seek to reframe and insist on the relevance and importance of presenting their issues to the other party. Subsequently, parties prioritise the issues and reach an agreement by discussing the specific issues which have been identified as common and important while ignoring those which may not be common between them, or leaving them for discussion in later stages or other sets of negotiations.114 The mediator’s role here, is to manipulate the cost and benefits or compromises of parties during the process. The mediator also supervises and guarantees an agreement.115 Guaranteeing an agreement is important because it keeps parties confident about the process. Consequently, the mediator is responsible for monitoring and verifying as well as guaranteeing an eventual agreement which is beneficial to the parties.116 Some of the benefits include enhancing functional relationship or gaining resources such as foreign aid.117 For instance, Bill Clinton pledged aid to Israel and the Palestinian Authority so that they could reach an agreement. Aid was beneficial to the parties because it was used by both parties to attract popular support from their constituents and to take care of the costs of implementing the agreement.118 The role of the mediator therefore is instrumental in peace processes because parties

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use the mediator to among other things, attract attention, to save face, to frame issues; in coalition building to expand networks, resources and constituents.\textsuperscript{119}

The mediator is therefore responsible for opening, encouraging and enhancing interaction between the parties. S/he is also responsible for making sure that parties reach a ripe moment. The mediator may therefore apply pressure not only for parties to meet and negotiate, but also for the implementation of the agreement reached by parties.\textsuperscript{120} The mediator therefore anticipates when parties need assistance and while this is not only confined to the beginning of negotiations, it lasts throughout the negotiation process.\textsuperscript{121} This explains the constant monitoring by the United States of America in the Middle East peace processes of which it is a mediator or monitoring implementation of the IGAD II Sudanese peace process.

**Mediation in Africa: Crossing the bridge**

As with all protracted and non protracted internal conflicts there is third party intervention as a form of conflict management. Available modes of third party intervention are outlined in the United Nations Charter Article 33 and include negotiations, mediation, arbitration, good offices. Most conflicts in Africa however have been managed using mediation. This method entails an external actor known as a mediator who assists the parties resolve their conflict. There are different types of mediators who have different interests in intervening in conflict. Among these reasons are to resolve or settle conflict and ensure that there is a return of peace, stability and security. It should however be underscored that an indicator which may be used to determine the level normalcy in a post conflict situation should be the reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers.

Depending on the type of mediator, parties in conflict including the mediator are supposed to experience beneficial outcomes from the process. The mediator often guarantees benefits like financial assistance. This assistance is usually directed towards post conflict reconstruction and peace building processes. In this context the mediator can determine additional programmes like the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers. The mediator can be a regionally or internationally recognised and reputable individual; it may an individual state; a group of states; an intergovernmental or non-governmental international, regional or sub regional organisation.

Besides ensuring peace and security is achieved intervention by mediators is further influenced the


\textsuperscript{121} Kleiboer M., Understanding Success and Failure of Mediation *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 40 No. 2 (June 1996) 360-389.
norms and values uphold and benefits to be derived from peaceful settlement and resolution of conflict. Using the legal instruments identified above as a basis, the mediator can make obligatory the implementation of universal values in protecting child soldiers.

Although the mediator is a key third party in the management of conflict, they also have other parties who support them and whose interests are expected to be achieved. In addition, the mediator is expected to remain in the process until the conflict has been settled or resolved. Ideally the mediator participates in the entire negotiation process. This ideal situation makes it possible for the mediator to monitor issues being negotiated and provide direction to the parties. In this context, the mediator may monitor negotiations concerning the reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers.

Where parties do not comply with negotiations and do not negotiate about certain issues like the reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers, the mediator may use pressure to compel them to negotiate. Since the mediator intervenes in the process, they can introduce those issues and package them for negotiation. At the heart of this argument is that parties may be unwilling to negotiate and need an intervening party to ensure other parties are aware of the issues and consider them to be valid and legitimate concerns. For instance, the mediator and other parties can be concerned about the implementation of universal values that seek to protect children in armed conflict. The mediator may also package the issues to be negotiated. This means that they can determine which issues should be negotiated together or separately, for instance although the reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers can be introduced within the broader framework of post conflict reconstruction it can be packaged together with reintegration and rehabilitation of soldiers. It may also be negotiated as a separate issue in which there is particular concentration on child soldiers. In addition, the mediator is also expected to monitor the process and implementation of negotiated agreements.

CONCLUSIONS: MEDIATION, INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE AND CHILD SOLDIERS

The contextual agenda of child soldiers needs to be integrated into the management of conflict. Besides advocacy on the legal protection of child soldiers by international and regional organisations, there is need for mediators and organisations engaged in international assistance to ensure that negotiation agendas include child soldiers. As described above, mediators have a number of functions in peace processes. They can introduce and package issues. In this context, the issue of child soldiers can be introduced as an agenda in situation in which institutional and non institutional parties use children in armed conflict. If the mediating party comprises intergovernmental organisations like ECOWAS or a group of states they can ensure that the
negotiating parties respect international legal frameworks for the protection of children in armed conflict and that these instruments are enshrined in the negotiated agreements. In addition, mediators can put pressure on parties to adopt the frameworks. Pressure on the parties may be in the form of reducing international assistance and sanctions. Indeed, some of the pressure can be from mediators’ supporters and constituents. Besides putting pressure in form of sanctions, the mediators’ supporters and constituents can compel parties to ensure that child soldiers are rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. In most cases, initiatives on rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers has been undertaken by international and domestic non-governmental organisations. Although these initiatives cannot be underestimated, it would also be important for official aspects of conflict management. Having official representation presupposes that the government will be accountable and is involved in the process of rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers into the community. The institutionalisation of this process is fundamental to its sustainability. It is also important in that official initiatives can be implemented to manage and mitigate factors that contribute to the recruitment of child soldiers. Poverty, weak social welfare systems and the availability of small arms and light weapons have been cited as triggers to the recruitment of child soldiers.\textsuperscript{122} Of course these cannot be studied in isolation since they trigger the recruitment of child soldiers. However, at the official level they can be mitigated to reduce the likelihood of child recruitment. The non legal forms of intervention in conflict seek to resolve conflict. Rather than settling conflict they deal in ensuring that values and needs are met. In addition to mediation the use of enquiry is important in cases in which children have been used as soldiers. Enquiry entails fact finding missions in which the mediator can ascertain and also confirm the use of child soldiers. Ultimately, the use of mediators is important in the resolution of conflict. It is also an important avenue for the entry of other actors who can provide international assistance such as rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers into communities.

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Youth in Fragile Nations: Peacebuilders or spoilers?

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ABSTRACT

There are more young people in today’s world than ever before in human history. ‘Youth are violence creators’ has become a common buzz. It is believed that a country with a youth population comprising more than one third of total population is at risk of an internal armed conflict. This proved true in Nepal and it experienced a decade long fierce fight that resulted into transformation of state structures. Now, the then rebels have secured majority in the legislative body and they are heading the government. Nepal has turned into a nascent republic nation as the youth led armed conflict abolished two and half century long monarchy.

My paper argues that over mobilization of youth in the post conflict stage has complicated the peacebuilding process. It has prolonged the post conflict transition period posing threat to economic recovery efforts. Politicization of young workers and students is fueling recurring tensions between trade unions and investors. The never concluding tussles in political arena of Nepal makes the neighboring two giant mega economies, China and India, feel security threat and questioning on capacity of Nepal handling the peace process.

At another side of the spectrum stands a positive view that concludes: youth are the bringers of change. Inviting youth in the post conflict peace process brings added values as experiences of young people are highly variable. Youth are not a single, homogenous entity either globally or locally therefore they represent diversity and range of needs and problems correspondingly. The paper shares living experiences of youth led peacebuilding initiatives in national as well as in community level. And, it argues that absence of youth friendly structures is a major hurdle in inviting youth participation in the peace process. The paper borrows examples from post conflict country context such as Nepal, East Timor and Sri Lanka.

Many features of contemporary youth demography are not well understood. Youth focused research and the role of youth in conflict prevention and post conflict reconstruction is rare. There is a dearth of knowledge as to what are the chronological steps that help evolve youth as peace builders.

Key words: Peacebuilders, demographic dividend, youth club, youth information centers, fragile nation

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT SETTING

The role of youth in fragile states is a deeply debated and controversial issue. There are two schools of thought - one that considers youth as conflict escalators (Urdal, 2006) and the other that considers the role of youth as peacebuilders (McEvoy-Levy 2001). In order to explore this topic, this paper will focus on a number of perspectives to examine youth in relation to its role in conflict and peace. In other words, it will recollect to what extent youth bulge theory fits in the ongoing Nepal situation. Additionally, given that Nepal is at unique geographical location, the trickledown effect of Nepal’s fragility to its neighboring countries and vice versa is relevant to look into. The views of scholars from Nepal compiled from authors research will be added in order to elaborate and incorporate practical and specific perspectives.

In the Asian context that includes Nepal, the definition of youth accommodates wide age group. To be consistent with the same trend among South Asian countries and for the purpose of this paper, youth is defined as people of age bracket starting from 16 to 35 years.

Nepal is a landlocked country that lies in South Asia surrounded by China in the north and India in south, east and west. The then underground Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) waged a decade long armed violence against the state. The internal war started from 1996 to 2006 which claimed around 15,000 lives. The armed conflict that was overwhelmingly supported by youth in escalating fierce fight was successful to overthrow the king and supporting systems that were more than two centuries old. The CPN (Maoist) party came to power through an election subsequently after the country was declared republican. Nepal is one of the smallest countries in the World. It is one among six landlocked fragile countries in the world listed by World Bank. Nepal is surrounded by sparsely populated Tibet in the North and densely populated India in the East, South and West. Nepal shares a 1,690 km land boundary with India and a 1,236 km with China. Nepal’s strategic importance as a buffer state between two emerging world powers has brought it into the international limelight.

The globally well-regarded magazine ‘Foreign Policy’, and another publication ‘Failed State Index’ draw conclusions that there is a high possibility that Nepal could fall back into conflict. They argue that political instability, a weak economy, delicate security and lack of rule of law are potential factors to push Nepal into vulnerability. The Failed State Index warns Nepal that if the ongoing elusive peace process does not reach a logical conclusion and the constitution is not promulgated on time, political parties may lose their legitimacy and non-state actors and armed groups may create anarchy across the country (The Fund for Peace 2010). This could lead Nepal to a condition of state collapse in which it can no longer perform its basic security and development
functions and that has no effective control over its territory and borders (ibid.). The risk of state failure is high in post conflict nations. After 2005, though there was gradual slow down of such internal armed conflict, it was found that 42.1% of countries with a stagnant economy lapsed back into conflict within a decade (Centre for Stabilisation and Reconstruction 2008).

DEFINING ‘FRAGILE NATION’

Fragile States refer arguably to a broad range of failing, failed and recovering states. Authors use ‘fragile’, ‘failing’ and ‘failed’ state interchangeably in some literatures. The Centre for Research on Inequality and Social Exclusion, for example, defines fragile states as ‘failing, or at risk of failing with respect to authority, comprehensive service entitlements or legitimacy’ (Steward F. & Brown G., 2009). There are states with other descriptions such as ‘poorly performing’ and ‘weak’ which are conceptually vague and cause huge difficulties when it comes to analysis (Housden, 2009). A failing state is one which can not longer ensure its basic security, development functions and that has no effective control over its territory and borders (ibid.).

The fragile states agenda is surrounded by a great deal of critical debate. The term itself is highly contested. Some argue it implicitly contains normative assumptions of how states should perform and a misguided notion that all states will eventually converge around a western model of statehood. However, there is little dispute about the severe impacts this group of states impose on the security and well-being of their population. A range of terminology has emerged which characterizes the relative strength or weaknesses of states on a continuum; from ‘weak’ and ‘fragile’ states at one end, to ‘failed’ and ‘collapsed’ states at the other. The meaning of all these terms is contested, many of them are seen to embed inherent contradiction, and in practice the terminology is inconsistently applied (Mclohlhin, 2010).

In a nutshell, the fragile nation is defined in this document as a country that is weak in following three fronts:

a. Authority to protect: the state is lack of authority to protect its citizens from violence of various kinds
b. Service delivery: the state is not in position to ensure that it’s citizens have access to basic services
c. Inadequate legitimacy: the state lacks legitimacy, enjoys only limited support among the people

One billion people, including about 340 million of the world’s extreme poor, are estimated to live in this small group of 30 to 50 fragile countries (Collier, 2007). They lag behind in meeting all the
Millennium Development Goals. The study about fragile states is about bringing together security and development to smooth the transition from conflict to peace and to embed stability so that development can sustain. These countries are caught in one or more of four traps: the conflict trap; the natural resources trap; the trap of being landlocked with bad neighbour; and the trap of bad governance in a small country (ibid.). Whilst these traps are not inescapable, standard solutions will not work. Over the past 5 years, how best to engage with fragile nations has emerged as a key priority in the international development community. This is of concern to the international community because fragile states impose large financial costs on themselves and on their neighbors. Evidence also shows that fragile states generate substantial and complex social costs including conflict, displacement of people, environmental destruction and disease. Recovery and development of a fragile country is not straightforward, as multiple factors are in play. Also, once a country has entered the fragile states status it usually takes 56 years for it to shed this status (Luthria, 2009). Since 2006, Nepal has been appearing among the bottom twenty-five countries in the Failed State Index published annually by Fund for Peace. The publication ranks every state recognized by the international community according to twelve indicators such as demographic pressure, uneven economic development along group lines, chronic and sustained human flight, mounting demographic pressure, security apparatus operates as a “state within a state,” to name some examples. According to the report, group grievance is the top most challenge that Nepal needs to overcome to escape from the on-going instability (Fund for Peace, 2011).

Youth Bulge Theory

‘Youth bulge’ theory stands on the premises that a large volume of youth population in any country that has a high percentage of unemployed youth due to stagnant economy is bound to plunge into violence. It is believed that a country with a youth bulge comprising more than one third of its population is at risk of an internal armed conflict (Urdal, 2007). Urdal adds that insecurity due to youth bulge increases further when such youth cohorts are not invited in activities of civilians. Or, if they have nothing to do. Migration of such population to urban areas where opportunities are limited exacerbates the risk of conflict. There is a significant link between youth demography and the way it reacts in the situation of unstable countries. This perspective is being advocated by experts and authors of conflict studies, political sciences and demography studies. They argue that the implication of youth bulge is that youth are involved in a range of spontaneous, low-intensity unrest and reoccurring political upheavals mainly waged against governments by different armed forces for different purposes including, but not limited to, demanding more regional autonomy, power in governance, and wider recognition for certain ethnic or regional groups (Urdal 2007 and Collins 2007).
PROLONGED INSTABILITY, YOUTH AND NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES:

Nepal’s geo-political situation has placed it at strategically important location for international community and its two giant neighbouring countries India and China. On the one hand, Nepal grapples with its own security, on the other questions arise whether Nepal has been able to ensure the security interests of India and China. Literature reconfirms that both India and China are skeptical about the capacity and the way Nepal is handling the security concerns of its neighbours.

This paper argues that because Nepal is suffering from its own political chaos and security lapses, there are numerous challenges in satisfying the security concerns of its neighbours that are rapidly emerging as global economic power houses. Meanwhile, due to bitter historical relations between these two neighbours and increasing trade and economic competitions between the World’s power houses, political landscape may get further complicated if Nepal does not strike balance dealing with the security interests of both.

Due to the fact that the Indian Maoist armed struggle is gaining ground in various states of India, there is enough ground for Indian establishments to be more nervous about the changing political development in Nepal, especially after the first election in the post-conflict stage that placed Nepali Maoists in the Constituent Assembly, the powerful legislative body, as a major political force. The establishment of India has been unhappy and shocked with the victory of Nepal’s Maoists’ in the Constituent Assembly (CA) election. India fears the Maoist electoral victory in Nepal will strengthen its own Maoists rebels, the Naxalites (Bajoria, 2008). Observers insist that India is persistently tactful in weakening the Maoist in Nepal. India is blamed for throwing its entire weight behind anti-Maoist political parties especially those from southern plains.

The extended anti-Chinese protests in the streets of Kathmandu in April and May 2008- immediately preceding the Beijing Olympics seem to have worried the Chinese authorities (Schmidt and Thapa 2011). There are sporadic anti-Chinese incidences erupting time and again specially spearheaded by the Tibetan refugees.

Once a country has experienced conflict its risk of recurring conflict remains very high. Immediately after hostilities there are a 40 percent chance of falling back into conflict, after that the risk falls by one percentage for each year of peace (Luthria 2009). Youth often play a prominent role in state failure. Regime characteristics may provide the incentives for youth to riot against the government...educated youth may engage in violent conflict behaviour if their expectations of influence in society and access to elite positions are not met (Urdal 2007 Collins 2007). In fact, it would be difficult to find any war-affected country where this is not the case (Sommers 2007b).
There is a large volume of unemployed youth in Nepal. The number of working age Nepalese currently unemployed is estimated at 2.5 million. Of Nepal’s total population, at least 30 percent is either unemployed or underemployed and 400,000 young people are entering labour market every year (Ghimire, A., Rajbanshi A., Upreti B.R., Gurung, G., Adhikari J., & Thieme S., 2010). The level of frustration among youth is growing. It is perceived that youth are taking frontline roles in the incidences of unrest and violence that are derailing stability. The increasing number of ‘nothing to do’-youth could be manipulated by peace spoilers to create threats to the on-going peace process. The security situation is weakening, especially at the southern borders of central and eastern terai districts (flat areas adjoining to India border), and youth are losing hope.

YOUTH AS VICTIMS OF CONFLICT

In contrast to Youth Bulge Theorists’ argument that youth are responsible for igniting conflict, Graca Machel’s report (1996) submitted to UN General Secretary posits that children and youth are the victims of violence committed by adults. She draws on her thorough study including visits and interviews with children and youth living in war torn zones and interaction with both government and rebel leaders. The crux of the report to the UN General Secretary from conflicting countries is that children and youth (below 18 years) are victims of war and they are facing a lot of atrocities. The fighting groups are exploiting them by using young people as porters, sex slaves, spies, human shields, minesweepers and suicide bombers (Michel, 1996).

Initial findings of research conducted by the author revealed that youth are fueling violence because it is incentivized by political parties. Violence is a stepping stone to secure scope and career in political parties for youth cadres. Violence therefore is adopted to gain visibility in political parties. There is no hesitation for youth leaders to lead a violent political demonstration under the banner of political parties (in-depth interview of Sitaula R., 2013).

The radical left political parties in Nepal, as a part of preparation for armed fight, indoctrinated theory of class struggle in the minds of youth creating enmity with rich people, city dwellers, high caste, well dressed and so forth (Ibid.). The official documents of these political parties reinforce this type of class tension and hatred. There is an easy way for any young person to get brain washed from the official documents and speeches of the political leaders.

A couple of experts with whom the author took in-depth interview showed their sympathy for the position of political parties emphasizing that violence is not always negative. They asserted that youth with a mission are violent in order to attain this mission. Durable peace is impossible when there is no transformation of an entire system that is discriminatory to the minorities, poor,
deprived sections of societies. Such transformation is possible through use of force (in-depth interview of Chalaune, U. 2013). Meantime, most of the experts interviewed by the author echoed the voice that there is a relationship between engagement of youth in violence and crisis they face to keep their kitchen fire burning. This is more so in the case of youth who migrate to cities and face a host of deprivations and discriminations. Youth become violent when a government is not protecting poor by controlling market prices of basic necessities including food.

YOUTH AS PEACE BUILDERS

This chapter argues that all youth as suggested above are not violent irrespective of their economic situation. While children and youth often are victimized by adult violence, they also have the power to be strong and be responsible change makers/factors in the peace building. The author’s studies and experience in working with youth made organizations in fragile countries suggest that youth are serious about their careers and future lives. They have repeatedly experienced turmoil in their career due to on-going political complications coupled with security risks. They are well aware that reoccurring violence and destabilization in the country do not lead to a better and prosperous future.

The reality that the author has experienced on the ground has to do with the practical problems that a state and other structures face due to limited resources and knowledge. There is a dearth of information about youth in countries that are experiencing protracted war and post conflict complications. Hence, many features of contemporary youth demography are not well understood. This is one of the stumbling blocks for the planners and leaders including government on the ground, preventing the potentialities of youth population from being harnessed for peace building and reconstruction. It is important to build a body of knowledge about youth in general and youth affected by violence in particular. In a fragile country like Nepal, both government and donors need to accord high priority in mapping the situation of youth and causes that are instigating them to take part in the violence and activities that fuel instability.

Experiences from Nepal prove that youth are significant actors in community level post conflict reconciliation and development. They are part and parcel of most of the peace building programmes in front line communities. Youth are also invited in peace related structures created during the post-conflict stage by government and political parties. Participation of youth in peace building through various forums has been instrumental combating direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence. Youth are taking up peace builders’ roles in different countries and for the global peace. In Nepal, at community level, capacities were enhanced of peace ambassadors, citizen journalists, community mediation support workers, psycho-social counselling workers and village peace pressure groups. Such projects have created active and functional local peace actors and peace
mechanisms. At the district level, establishment of the peace centres has created a space for interacting and discussing PVSE (Poor, Vulnerable and Socially Excluded) women and youth issues for inclusion and policy advocacy activities (CARE International, 2012).

The sub-headings and paragraphs below further elaborate how youth are contributing in the restoring peace in national and community levels:

FOREIGN EMPLOYMENT: AN ECONOMIC INTEGRATION STRATEGY?
Youth bulge in the current context of Nepal is showing different implications which is rather positive in the households as well as national economy. There is a direct link between economic stability due to incoming remittances and a slow-down of armed violence in Nepal. Due to growth of remittances, Nepal managed economic stability during the decade long conflict (Kandel 2011). While armed conflict was escalating and belligerents and other unscrupulous elements were active in utilizing youth in erupting violence and instability, Nepal was wise enough to adopt additional measures to actively link its young masses with other countries in Gulf through putting policy provisions in place and creating relevant structures within and outside the country. These initiatives not only helped minimize frustrations of youth but also earned foreign currency in the form of remittances that proved instrumental in rehabilitating a war torn economy of Nepal where unemployment surfaced as a vital reason for poverty. Nepal is aware enough that unemployment is the main factor for protracted poverty in the country and poverty remains chronic as long as the youth population is not mobilized.

The Nepal Living Standard Survey report 2011 throws some interesting and encouraging facts. It states that the income of poor Nepalese is increasing at a faster rate. It shows that the income of the poorest 20 percent of the population increased almost four times than the last living standard survey. The latest update concludes that 55.8 percent of Nepali households receive the remittance (NLSS 2011). According to the findings of this survey, remittance sending youth represent 95 percent of acutely poor rural households. In these areas, poverty has declined dramatically, falling from 31 percent in 2003-4 to 25.16 percent in 2011 (ibid.). Many households are unable to produce enough food now buy food from the market with the help of a remittance income (Adhikari 2011).

The UN and Save the Children documents portray youth as peace builders. They highlight experiences from different war ridden countries where youth have contributed taking initiatives in advancing national and community level peace building efforts that are found instrumental in restoring peace. They consider youth as central formulators of peace related programming. If youth
are organized in clubs or groups, they should be directly supported in a way that builds their capacities for crisis prevention (Thania, 2002).

Schwartz rightly argued that an understanding of youth roles in conflict is incomplete without both sides of the equation: As perpetrator and victims of violence, and as leader of grassroots peace efforts. Therefore, dealing with youth issues is central to fostering sustainable peace (Schwartz S, 2010).

Unlike other actors, youth are not visible in their efforts and projects in peace building. Their peace initiatives and actions are born in response to the tensions that they face due to the cleavages in community and grass root settings. Youth are underestimated as positive agents of change and key actors in peace building, both by policy-makers and academics. Much less scholarly attention has been given to the peace building activities of youth than to their violence. This is in part because youth social movements are rarely unambiguously ‘peace’ oriented, at least as it is defined in the mainstream literature (McEvay-Levy, 2001).

With the right investments and continued progress through the demographic transition, youth populations can become large, economically-productive populations that can drive economic gains—a phenomenon known as the demographic dividend. The rapidly growing economies of East and South Asia are the living examples. This is true in the case of Nepal where the remittance received from its 3 million youth working in different countries is contributing significantly in recovering economy that is ailing from a decade long armed conflict and development infrastructures being rehabilitated. Remittance from youth labourers working abroad constitutes 22 percent of GDP. The World Bank marks Nepal as one of the top five remittance recipients in the region (The World Bank, 2011). The economists in Nepal claim that remittance has done what development efforts could not do in the last five decades with respect to alleviating poverty. This is also true in the case of surplus of youth population in Bangladesh. The World Bank Global Economic Perspective Report, 2006, points out that remittance inflow has made it possible to cut poverty by 6 percent in Bangladesh. Given the low per capita income and low productivity the impact on poverty reduction in a small country like Nepal is higher. Nepal Living Standard Survey carried out by National Planning Commission acknowledges that remittance is the most significant contributors in improving the living conditions of people (NLSS, 2011).
Community Level Youth Initiatives for Peace

The paragraphs below recollect experiences of youth led activities in the communities while violence was high during 1996 to 2006. They are youth led activities that are found instrumental in post conflict stage too facilitating the harmonization process.

Engagement of child/youth clubs and their members

The establishment of child/youth clubs and their networks as micro-level institution in communities was one of the milestones in youth participation. They created opportunities for youth-led organizations to involve themselves in enhancing their understanding and documenting history of local resources such as rivers, points, grazing land, temple and surrounding land, forests, canal etc. This has helped children and youth to raise their voices collectively as well as to establish themselves as key actors in front of local level development and political structures. As such, the roles of children and youth are gradually becoming visible in communities thereby highlighting their capacities in the communities. Over the years the resistance from elders and seniors promoting and supporting the rights of children and youth has decreased significantly. The environment has thus become more conducive for children and youth's participation in social work and governance (Karki, B., Khatiwada C., Binadi, D., Acharya, L., & Thapa S., 2012).

Opportunity to participate in the functioning of clubs and leadership transfer:

One of the major objectives of supporting children and youth to organize child/youth clubs and their network is to provide them with opportunities to learn democratic values and practice in the processes. The members of child/youth clubs are participating in internal functions and decision making processes within the clubs as well as in the election (or selection) of key leadership positions (e.i. Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer etc.) in the club and networks. Externals can distinctly notice the children and youth following democratic process in electing the key members of the clubs either by consensus or by election (ibid.). Likewise, the majority of child/youth clubs and their network organize monthly meetings to gain some understanding and better communication which are effective procedures for dispute resolution within the clubs as well as transferring leadership within clubs and offer necessary technical support in this regard.

Participation of child/youth clubs in schools

There is a emerging trend of schools inviting members of child/youth club members during School Management Committee (SMC) meetings. In certain schools they have nominated focal teacher who take the bridging roles between clubs and school management. However, the participation of club representatives is limited to matters related to a school's operation or conducting classes. In
matters related to school construction, infrastructure development and in a school’s external affairs, child/youth participation need to be further enhanced (ibid.).

**Participation of children and youth in the Village Development Committee (VDC) and District Development Committee (DDC) level planning process**

Representatives of the network of child/youth clubs were invited, as one of the stakeholders, for participation in the pre-planning meeting organized by the VDC in community level. Similarly, the district level networks of child/youth clubs were invited as an advisor in the finalization process of the DDC planning at the district level.

The child/youth clubs and their networks are gradually gaining recognition at the community, VDC and district levels. The work done by the child/youth clubs regarding community mediation and children and youth’s issues has helped them gain this recognition. Additionally, child/youth clubs are maintaining coordination and linkages with mainstream structures e.g. School, Village Child Protection Committee, DDC, District Administration Office and District Police Office. These clubs have developed issue specific networks. For example, the Janajagaran Youth Club, Dahan coordinated with the VDC and DDC to run a campaign to declare Open Defecation Free in ward number 1, 2, 8 and 9 of the VDC. And, coordinated with the District Administration Office to run an anti child marriage campaign. Jan Ekta Parivartan Youth Club-Manma was successful in influencing the VDC Council to provide funds through youth clubs and their networks beginning in 2008. (ibid.).

**Reintegration of ex-combatant youth**

During the armed conflict and post-conflict period, youth were oriented on the bases of importance to be involved in developmental activities. Hence, youth returning from armed violence are identified and listed by the youth clubs and they are accorded high priority in most of their programmes. The Youth Associated with Armed Force and Armed Groups (YAAFAG) are invited to Youth clubs, Youth Information centers through door to door visit by youth themselves. They are invited to be a part of the vocational and micro-enterprise development trainings. Special staff members were provisioned in NGOs for counseling support to rejoin ex-combatants youths to school, family and youth-led structures.

**Youth Information Center as a step for Economic and Social recovery**

The Youth information centre is a forum that has the potential to bring youth views and participation in local peace building and reintegration of youth in the post-conflict stage. Moreover, the aim is to construct a tool for social healing processes.

There are Youth Information Centres that are either a part of Youth Clubs or sister structures. However in both situations, local youth club members are actively engaged in day-to-day operation
and management. They are successful in disseminating information about HIV/AIDS, peacebuilding, sexual health and so forth (Maharjan, 2011).

Youth Information Centers are informing youth and developing their leadership engaging them in following:

- Creating space and structure for youth to represent their concerns and ventilate their voices
- Mobilizing youth force in the reconstruction of the community that was destroyed by the decade long armed conflict
- Promoting youth access to relevant information, represent youth interest and accommodate youth of different background-ethnic, gender, disable, language etc.
- Providing information and counselling services on: sexual and reproductive health, foreign employment, HIV and AIDS, youth participation in peace, vocational training and gainful economic activities
- Informing youth migrating to abroad in search of job about proper travel documents, travel tips, work place safety, labour rules of those countries
- Mobilizing resources from local development and political units such as VDC, DDC etc (ibid.).

**CONCLUSION**

This paper presented three main views on the role of young people in relation to conflict. The most generalized ones see young people in a negative light, that is, as violent actors. The second and third perceives youth as victims of conflict and the change agents as well as peacebuilders respectively.

The crux of the youth bulge theory is that youth are drivers for the escalation of violence and instability. This is more so in fragile nations when youth are unemployed. The critiques of youth bulge theory emphasize that it would be too simplistic to argue that large numbers of youth cohorts that are economically disengaged are the source of volatility for any country suffering from post conflict crisis. Unlike other arguments, the study commissioned by the UN and led by Graça Machel finds a different conclusion. It reveals that armed conflict being fought in different parts of the globe are victimizing children and youth in a range of ways including using them as spies, frontline runners, suicide bombers and so forth.

The last section proposes that young people should be seen and studied as agents of positive change. If youth are only perceived as the “devil in demographics” or as only helpless and powerless actors, their power and potential will not be harnessed for peace.
Even in the war torn societies youth are indicating that given the proper space as per their capacities they could be an instrumental in the conflict transformation and peace building. Nepal is a concrete example cited in this document. This is an area not yet studied thoroughly in global as well as in the Nepal scenario. The main endeavour of this document also lies in the re-capturing of evidences and examples of how youth are contributing in the peace building. Demographic dividend is referred in this document as one of the driving concepts. It is perceived that Nepal was clever enough to chuck out the strategy sending its youth population to the foreign employment to curb from the risk of youth bulge. The same strategy has been working well to economically stabilize the country and alleviating the level of poverty.
REFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

Ninety one percent of the world’s 2.2 billion children live in Majority World nations. Eighty percent of the poorest nations are experiencing a major civil war or have in their recent past. Eighty-six percent of all countries experiencing a new outbreak of civil conflict had sixty percent or more of the population younger than thirty.

This study presents a descriptive moral framework for mobilizing effective and ethical child participation in peace processes in Majority World nations impacted by or at high risk of armed intrastate conflict (MWNIAIC) in the form of a Child Peacebuilding Wheel. It draws upon: (a) the moral frameworks of just war, pacifism, and just peacemaking theories, (b) good practices presented in child participation theory, (c) works addressing child and youth peacebuilding, (d) my own original research findings in Colombia. The moral framework addresses both physical and psychological issues related to children’s: (a) security, (b) peacebuilding freedom, and (c) their developing capacity and responsibility.

Keywords: child, youth, peacebuilding, participation, conflict
INTRODUCTION

This article is an extremely brief overview of a much longer dissertation available by contacting the author (Mike@JustChildren.org) or ProQuest (http://disexpress.umi.com).

BACKGROUND

Today there are over 2.2 billion people younger than eighteen (UNICEF, 2011, p. 111). That is one third of our world’s population. The more shocking reality is that ninety-one percent of these children are in Southern or Majority World nations (UNICEF, 2011, p. 111). Seventy-seven countries have forty percent or more of their population younger than eighteen (UNICEF, 2009).

There has also been a dramatic increase in armed conflict within the Majority World over the last half-century and the vast majority of these conflicts are intrastate conflicts rather than conflicts between states (Bracken & Petty, 1998, pp. 3, 9; UNICEF, 2004, p. 163). In fact, sixteen of the twenty poorest nations are experiencing a “major civil war” presently or have in their recent past (UNICEF, 2004). There is an unfortunate but compelling correlation between children, poverty, and violence that seems to perpetuate continued civil war.

Research on “youth bulges” brings even greater clarity to these connections. Youth bulge theorists use demographic and historical evidence to show nations with large portions of their population between fifteen and twenty-nine years old—as a portion of their population older than fourteen—have significantly increased risk of armed conflict. Heinrick Urdal explains.

An increase in youth bulges of one percentage point is associated with an increased likelihood of conflict of around 7%... Furthermore, countries experiencing youth bulges of 35% run three times the risk of conflict compared to countries with youth bulges equal to the median for developed countries, all other variables at mean.

In 2000, most developed countries including most of Western Europe, US, Canada and Japan, experienced youth bulges of 17% or below, while 44 developing countries experienced youth bulges of 35% or above (Urdal, 2004, p. 9).

Urdal’s research reveals that poor economic performance, combined with a youth bulge, can be particularly dangerous (Urdal, 2004).124 Other youth bulge research shows that about eighty-six

124 Influential youth bulge theorist Gunnar Heinsohn paints an even more deterministic picture that is not nearly as widely accepted. Speaking of providing “better food, education, and medical care” in impoverished youth bulge contexts, Heinsohn states the following. “No combination could be more explosive. Peace activists promise that the victory over hunger will also bring victory over war. Youth bulge analysis, however, shows again and again that when hunger ends, the killing starts in earnest. Why? Because humanitarian measures have made millions of sons stronger and better educated. For bread, people beg; for positions in
percent of “all countries that experienced a new outbreak of civil conflict had age structures with 60 percent or more of the population younger than 30 years of age” (Cincotta & Leahy, 2006). Nearly sixty-five percent of the Middle East is younger than thirty and represents an area of particular concern (Dhillon, 2008; Dhillon & Yousef, 2009).

It is clear that before every youth bulge there is a child bulge and that child bulge may occur concurrently. It is also clear that a large portion of our world’s children live in contexts impacted by, or at high risk of armed conflict. If something does not change that reality will continue or increase along with all the destruction it brings with it.

We also see that many contemporary conflicted societies are caught in self-perpetuating cycles of violence that can last for decades (e.g. Somalia, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo) (Brainard & Chollet, 2007; Collier, 2003; Brainard & Chollet, 2007; Ndogoni et al., 2002). Majority world nations impacted by or at high risk of armed intrastate conflict (MWNIAIC) are places where great changes in thoughts and actions are needed in order to break or prevent cycles of violence and the suffering it brings.

Much research and everyday experience shows us clearly that children are more likely than are adults to change their ideas and behavior. Nevertheless, most assistance given to MWNIAIC goes toward providing basic relief aid and changing the behaviors of adult leaders (Veso, 2008, p. 107; Boothby, Strang, & Wessells, 2006, p. 143; Hart & Khatiwada, 2004, p. 4). Such efforts are important, but they neglect to leverage an enormous natural resource that is abundantly available within these contexts—the young people themselves.

Table 1 below offers some of the many child peacebuilding examples from around the world. Each new context provides distinct child peacebuilding opportunities. Many, if not most, child peacebuilding examples may be scaled and adapted for the diverse contexts of MWNIAIC as well as for more developed contexts. Children’s demographic abundance and greater malleability, along with powerful child peacebuilding examples, suggest that children may be able to provide peacebuilding energy and actions that significantly accelerate the shifts needed to sustain durable peace in contemporary contexts impacted by or at high risk of armed conflict.

Regrettably, young people in MWNIAIC are consistently viewed as the problem, at least a large part of it. With the scope of the challenge before us, it is worth seriously considering a paradigm shift in the way we go about preventing and addressing conflicts in MWNIAIC. An important beginning is to end viewing young people “negatively, as problems to be dealt with rather than potential to be tapped” (Brainard & Chollet, 2007, pp. 12-13).

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society, they fight” (Heinsohn, 2005, p. 7). Thus, he ruthlessly encourages the removal of aid from such contexts.
Here is where we are beginning to see a small but significant ray of hope as some researchers begin seeing the potential of the large numbers of children and youth within MWNIAIC as valuable resource helpful for averting the violence that some predict (Magnuson & Baizerman, 2007; Vat Kamatsiko, 2005, p. 12; Brainard & Chollet, 2007, p. 13; McEvoy-Levy, 2006; Schwartz, 2010). Such researchers acknowledge the complexity of MWNIAIC and argue more often; “The agency of youth in war and postwar situations is multidimensional and extremely influential. Young people’s actions, and their collective narrations of those actions, influence how conflicts are experienced, remembered, transmitted across generations, and, potentially, transformed” (Boothby et al., 2006, pp. 133, 134). The conflict-transforming power of young people is not only in their demographic abundance and learning abilities but also in their energy, “their natural idealism and innovation,” and their creativity, that is actually nurtured as they seek survival in “vulnerable and precarious situation” (Boothby et al., 2006, p. 149).

Time is of the essence. In his book on children and spiritual beliefs and practices, researcher George Barna states emphatically, that after decades of research he sees extensive evidence that “the spiritual condition of adolescents and teenagers changes very little, if at all as they age” (Barna, 2003). He is referring to both the beliefs and practices, or thoughts and actions, that continue into adulthood. Barna advocates strongly for nurturing beliefs and practices in children that will benefit them for a lifetime and benefit their society even longer.

What are more important contexts in which to nurture morally and religiously rooted peacebuilding beliefs and practices in children than contexts that have raised their children amidst the examples of war? For example, the 1984 Rwanda genocide took around seven thundered thousand lives in ninety days while ninety percent of Rwandans identified as Christians (Longman, 2009; Forges & Forges, 1999). Many minors joined in the killing. Marc Gopin presents detailed arguments on why, in order to break cycles of violence in conflicted societies, it is essential that peacebuilding and reconciliation are seen as a core enactments of one’s faith rather than peripheral beliefs (Gopin, 2002a; Gopin, 2002b).

Hart and Khatiwada reiterate our current state and the importance of discovering how to better engage children in MWNIAIC as peacebuilders.

Here the emphasis tends to be upon the provision of services to children and on their protection by agency staff and mobilized adults in the community. Participation may be seen as too risky or simply not essential during a time of emergency. Nevertheless, as will be argued, children’s participation may be a crucial means by which protection is enhanced and the efforts to build peace pursued more effectively. In addition, the evidence suggests that, when given a chance, young people are able to
make a valuable contribution for the benefit of themselves and their communities (Hart & Khatiwada, 2004, p. 4). Others agree with their conclusion, stating that; “Along with early memories of love and nurturing and the coping skills of parents, active political participation is believed to enhance resilience for war-affected children” (Cairns, 1996; Boothby, 1983; Boothby et al., 2006, p. 150). Youth “narrative-creation and peer-education roles, if better understood, could be utilized as peace-building mechanisms. Youth narratives provide useful, nuanced, and new knowledge about conflict and peace that could inform and authenticate peace-education programs” (Boothby et al., 2006, pp. 149, 150).

TABLE 1
CHILD PEACEBUILDING EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCAL EXAMPLES</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Patrols</strong>–Liberia: Young people work together in a formal structure, with help from adults, to patrol the campus of the school in pairs or small groups, acting non-confrontationally to help prevent violence, maintain order, enforce rules, and report crime or crime-threatening situations. They increase their own and others overall security and safety with a minimal temporary increase in risk (Malie, 11/11/11 11:11am).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Children Providing Aid</strong>–Sri Lanka: Separated children in a conflict affected area of Sri Lanka identified the problem of child malnutrition and chose to weekly collect food from their own household supply and together decided to give it to children in greatest need (Hart, Atkins, Markey, &amp; Youniss, 2004, p. 18). By helping meet the basic needs of children in their community, these children decreased other children’s vulnerability to military recruitment for survival (Bergquist, Penaranda, &amp; G, 2001).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bhutanese Refugee Children’s Forum</strong>–Bhutan: A network of children’s organizations working in IDP camps became know as the Bhutanese Refugee Children’s Forum. Children elected peers “at different geographical levels (‘ward’, ‘sector’ and so on) and it was their duty to air the concerns and aspirations of their constituents at regular meetings of their camp’s BRCF” (Hart et al., 2004, p. 19). By doing so, they were able to nurture a safer peaceful coexistence within their community, and practice increased productive peaceful civic participation, which helps decrease their likelihood of disillusionment (Hill, Davis, Prout, &amp; Tisdall, 2004, p. 83; Sinclair, 2004, pp. 113-114) and attempts to bring change through violence.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Street Theatre &amp; Protests</strong>–Israel/Palestine: Israeli and Palestinian youth have developed various creative nonviolent demonstrations including using street theatre to protest occupation (Svirsky 2001; (McEvoy-Levy, 2006, p. 19).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Civic Works and Reconciliation Dialogue for Ex-combatants</strong>–Sierra Leone: “Many [child and adult] community members reported that the civic works project, together with the psychosocial workshop and dialogues on reconciliation, had increased unity, reduced community divisions and improved relations between ex-combatants and civilians” (McEvoy-Levy, 2006, p. 43). Children and youth can help identify, organize and participate in civic work projects, and facilitate and/or participate in dialogues on reconciliation at local and national levels as seen in Colombia (Cameron, 2001) and South Africa (UNICEF, 2010).</td>
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</table>
| **Building Shared Meeting Places**–Bosnia: Youth rebuilt a fountain to recreate a historic meeting place for young people of their deeply conflicted communities (McEvoy-Levy, 2006, pp. 197-203). Strengthening intergroup ties is critical for sustaining peace in deeply divided societies (Merkle, 2003, p. 214; Lederach, 1998;
This simple, inexpensive, reproducible, child-lead effort was an exemplary act of community reconciliation that provided an ongoing natural space for reconciliation.

NATIONAL EXAMPLES

Peer Reconciliation Groups—Australia: South Australian Youth Reconciliation Council (SAYRC) “organized peer education on reconciliation in schools, and contributed Indigenous perspectives to the Constitutional Centenary Foundation and to Youth Parliaments (Lincoln Ndogoni et al., 2002, Children and Peacebuilding: Experiences and perspectives, 47:32).” The Avila Girls College in Australia consisting of 7 to 12-years-olds also initiated their own reconciliation groups (Avila College, 2012).

Children in Truth Commissions–South Africa: Children’s participation in South Africa’s truth and reconciliation commissions was instrumental in: a) creating a more accurate historic record, b) offering children official, largely accepted, nonviolent public space to express their anger so as to help mitigate the risk of violent revenge, c) cultivating truer public memory for greater potential healing to occur, d) modeling children’s legitimate and meaningful civic participation (UNICEF, 2010).

MULTIPLE LEVEL EXAMPLES

YACSA Policy Research and Think-Tanks. Youth Affairs Council of South Africa organizes research and think-tanks on topics of interest to young people and the youth sector, thereby, creating opportunities for children to devise peacebuilding strategies, policy and action plans to present to NGO and government leaders (Youth Affairs Council of South Africa, 2012).

Film Making for Peace–South Asia: Children can build peace through “peer education, setting up child-led organisations, carrying out research or creating and producing programmes for the broadcast media. For example, in South Asia, Save the Children supported a children’s film-making group to produce films on violence against children” (Bond, 2006:19). The YACSA has also created media for policy promotion (Youth Affairs Council of South Africa, 2012).

Technology for Peace–Young activist use chat rooms, other web-based tools, and texting, to create virtual spaces for political interaction and activism (Boothby et al., 2006, p. 144). Children can use these tools to promote and implement national and/or local peacebuilding action plans and events.

Teaching Peaceful Conflict Resolution: In villages, schools, or IDP camps children can teach skills to other children for resolving conflict without violence.

Significance

Despite the scope of the need, the citation of the opportunity, and the urgency to leverage that opportunity, extremely little significant research has been done on how to effectively and ethically engage children as peacebuilders in MWNIAIC, and relatively few projects attempt the task (Roholt, Hildreth, & Baizerman, 2009, p. 180). This research is necessary to better position ourselves to more effectively engage children as peacebuilders in MWNIAIC (Cairns, 1996, p. 184). Unfortunately, “of
all the roles of youth in war zones, their participation in formal and informal peace communities is the least documented and analyzed," writes McEvoy-Levy (Boothby et al., 2006, p. 145).

PURPOSE
The purpose of this study is to explore how children may participate more ethically and effectively in peace processes in majority world nations impacted by or at high risk of armed intrastate conflict (MWNIAIC). The aim of this research is to help those considering mobilizing children's participation in peace processes in MWNIAIC to more freely discover and create efforts that are more ethical and effective.

METHODOLOGY
A grounded theory approach was used to allow theory to emerge from the data. In June and July of 2008 interviews and focus groups were conducted throughout Colombia—a Majority World nation impacted by decades of armed intrastate conflict and with significant child peacebuilding experience. Sixteen focus groups were facilitated in a semi-structured format. Nine were conducted with children eight to seventeen years old, and seven were conducted with adults. The average age of child focus group participants was 12.75 (n=52). Child focus groups varied in size from five to seven participants with an average of 5.8 participants per group. Adult focus groups also varied in size from five to seven participants with an average of 5.4 participants per group.

Also conducted were eleven, thirty-minute\textsuperscript{125} in-person adult interviews asking descriptive, structural and contrasting questions (Spradley, 1979; Isaac & Michael, 1995), and twelve, typically thirty-minute, in-person interviews with children, age nine to fourteen, using play therapy techniques and asking descriptive, structural and contrast questions pre-tested and developed with children (Borgers, de Leeuw, & Hox, 2000:66, 60-75;).

The data analysis software Nvivo\textsuperscript{9} was used to code responses to each question and code responses from each participant. Next Nvivo\textsuperscript{9} was used to organize responses into overall themes and themes related to specific questions. Initial coding lead to focused coding and then writing, sorting and integrating Standard Observation Form data, leading to theoretical sampling as I searched for emerging theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Ethnographic methodology was used in the sense that I sought enter children's world and "be

\textsuperscript{125} Adult interview numbers 39, 37, 14, 11, 10 and 9 were all thirty minutes in length. Interviews number 27 and 5 were forty minutes. Interview 6 was thirty-five minutes. Interview 23 was twenty-five minutes and interview 17 was twenty minutes.
‘taught’ the ways, language and expectations” of conflict-affected children in relation to peacebuilding (Greene & Hogan, 2005, p. 124; Lewis, Kellett, Robinson, Fraser, & Ding, 2004). In order to develop a descriptive moral framework for understanding children’s participation in peacebuilding that is uniquely applicable in MWNIAIC I draw from: (a) the moral frameworks of just war, pacifism, and just peacemaking theories, (b) good practices presented in child participation theory, (c) works addressing child and youth peacebuilding, (d) my own original research findings in Colombia, and (e) my personal experience that includes over a decade of work with children in MWNIAIC; experience in over forty countries; and my practice, experience and training as a child psychologist.

DELIMITATIONS
This study will focus on effective child participation in peace processes in the MWNIAIC of Colombia and test the findings against precedent literature in the fields of child peacebuilding, child participation and theories of response to violence. Though very little has been written on youth as peacebuilders, much less has been written on children as peacebuilders. Since there is extremely little research on child peacebuilding, it is advantageous to compare and contrast findings with related fields. The child participation field is fairly developed despite being relatively new. Theories of appropriate response to violence are quite developed despite the absence of discussions of appropriate children’s responses to violence. When engaging with theories of appropriate response to violence, this child peacebuilding study focuses upon the dominant theories of just war and pacifism, and includes the burgeoning theory of just peacemaking. These three theories cover the vast majority of primary themes in the conversation of appropriate responses to violence. This study will focus on children nine to fourteen years old. This is an approximate age range where children have greater capacity than younger children and greater malleability than older children. The study will not focus on armed conflict in or between developed nations. Much has been written on the experiences of child soldiers and efforts to bring healing to war-traumatized children and youth. This study does not focus on these two topics except where helpful to the conversation of children as peacebuilders in MWNIAIC.

LIMITATIONS
Interviews and focus groups were conducted throughout Colombia with adults and children in both rural and urban settings who were involved with diverse organizations serving war-affected children. Data was collected in June and July of 2008, with a limited number of respondents who were included in one interview and/or focus group. Though the data set was large enough to reach
saturation in identifying many themes, it was not large enough to make reliable comparisons between responses from sub-groups of participants. Examples of this include comparisons between: rural and urban respondents, children of different ages, boys in a peacebuilding project and boys not in a peacebuilding project, organizations of different sizes, different types of child peacebuilding projects, child respondents who had lost a family member and those who had not. A more diverse and numerous dataset would allow for such comparisons.

Findings from interviews and focus groups in Colombia should be restricted to that context. However, where specific Colombia research findings can be sufficiently corroborated by research in other contexts, these particular findings may be held to the extent justified by the supporting research with which the Colombia findings are triangulated. For this reason, Colombia findings were compared and contrasted with findings from precedent literature in multiple fields but primarily in the fields of child peacebuilding, child participation, and adult peacebuilding or appropriate responses to violence.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

This study seeks to develop a descriptive moral framework for mobilizing effective and ethical child participation in peace processes in MWNIAIC. It is arranged in five parts: (1) contextual background, (2) child peacebuilding gaps and contributions in just peacemaking, pacifism and just war theories, (3) a description of the research methodology, (4) analysis, and (5) an emerging moral framework.

In part one, chapter one explores the contemporary reality and dynamic interaction of children, poverty and violence in MWNIAIC. Chapter two explores violence and peacebuilding in the Latin American and Colombian contexts.

In part two, chapter three considers the gaps and contributions of just peacemaking, pacifism and just war theories toward forming a better understanding of children's appropriate participation as peacebuilders in MWNIAIC.

In part three, chapter four describes the research preparation, process and analysis for the research conducted throughout Colombia. Chapter five is a detailed exploration of why some child and adult participants had difficulty comprehending and/or responding to some interview and focus group questions.

In part four, chapter six analyzes the data from the interviews and focus groups conducted with children in Colombia and then offers findings in the form of themes resulting from each question. In the same way, chapter seven offers findings resulting from adult responses. Chapter eight explores the value of having discovered limited religious or spiritual responses from participants.

In part five, chapter nine presents a triadic moral framework for child participation in peacebuilding.
OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The findings from Colombia and a study of precedent literature suggest that the lack of a moral framework for child participation in peacebuilding significantly hinders the ability of children and adults to imagine, create, and participate in peacebuilding opportunities for children in MWNIAIC. When half the casualties of war globally are children, and children are abundantly present in the vast majority of MWNIAIC, it seems unreasonable to have moral frameworks only for adults responding to violence. A moral framework for child participation in peacebuilding, that is applicable in MWNIAIC, could be used to help overcome multiple obstacles to seeing many more children mobilized as peacebuilders.

The child participation field offers much to the conversation seeking a moral framework for child peacebuilding, but the field deals insufficiently with the unique moral complexities and security issues that are normative with children’s participation in peacebuilding in MWNIAIC. Theories articulating moral responses to violence—primarily just war theory, pacifism, and just peacemaking—offer insights helpful for addressing the moral conundrums present within interstate armed conflict, and to a more limited degree those present within MWNIAIC. However, these theories completely neglect to directly address the moral conundrums unique to children’s responses to violence in MWNIAIC.

A moral framework for child participation in peacebuilding in MWNIAIC builds upon, and dynamically interrelates with, adult responsibility. However, a moral framework for children must also be built on children’s varying abilities to respond at different stages in their bio-psycho-social-pneuma development, while considering their safety and nurturing their freedom. The moral framework evident within this study, and presented in the form of the Child Peacebuilding Wheel, addresses both physical and psychological issues related to (a) children's security, (b) children's peacebuilding freedom, and (c) children’s developing capacity and responsibility. The framework presented herein is a descriptive framework. It is derived from my research and helps organize findings from multiple relevant sources—including, but not limited to, adult and child interview and focus group participants in Colombia. The moral framework presented in the Child Peacebuilding Wheel is not a theoretical model that has been tested and proven. Additional research is needed to determine if the framework is normative.
CHILD PEACEBUILDING WHEEL AND ASSOCIATED QUESTIONS

The Child Peacebuilding Wheel below gives a concise visual overview or summary of the triadic tensions to hold in a moral framework for children's appropriate participation in peacebuilding. Children's developing capacity and responsibility, efforts to nurture children's peacebuilding freedom, and a commitment to ensure children's safety all dynamically interrelate with one another to inform appropriate peacebuilding actions.

Children’s responsibility expands proportionately with their developing capacity. Ongoing physical development continues to allow children new opportunities for peacebuilding that were either not possible or not appropriate before. A child’s developing psychological capacity also impacts increases in his or her peacebuilding responsibility. A child’s expanding cognitive capacity and growing maturity in navigating psychological processes (i.e. spiritual and psychosocial experiences) suggest the appropriateness of increasing the child's peacebuilding responsibility. A child’s physical and psychological capacities interact with one another and cannot be determined by age alone. Trauma and other environmental factors can delay or excel a child's development beyond what is normative for their age.

Children’s physical and psychological freedom to build peace ought to be nurtured through constructive rather than destructive means. Children should be given increased physical access to developmentally appropriate peacebuilding opportunities and not physically forced to participate or prevented from doing so. Children’s psychological freedom to build peace should be nurtured through experiential training that offers increased understanding of appropriate peacebuilding options and increases children’s psycho-social and spiritual capacity to build peace. Those seeking to increase children’s psychological freedom to build peace should take care to avoid manipulating, coercing or deceiving children into taking certain peacebuilding actions. A person is not responsible to do what they are not capable of doing. Nurturing children’s peacebuilding freedom can also increase their peacebuilding responsibility. Yet, capacity and freedom do not determine appropriate responsibility in isolation from one another. Children’s safety must also be considered.

Exceptional attention must be paid to ensuring children’s physical and psychological safety when encouraging or allowing participation in peacebuilding activities. In each potential child peacebuilding activity, one must consider to the best of his or her ability if an increase or decrease in risk to a participant’s safety is likely based on a change in participant’s location, the information s/he acquires, who s/he is associated with, protection offered before during or after the activity, and his or her developing capacity and freedom. A child with sufficient physical and psychological capacity may be granted the freedom to choose a degree of increased risk to their safety. Doing so can be a way of nurturing his or her peacebuilding freedom and capacity. For example, a child with
reasonable capacity may be appropriately granted the freedom to accept a degree of increased risk associated with a fast for peace or a particular longer peace march, whereas, a child of lesser capacity ought not be granted the freedom to choose such activities. Each child’s unique psychological vulnerabilities should be considered in evaluating his or her safety associated with a particular peacebuilding activity. Some peacebuilding activities can push a child beyond his or her capacity and result in trauma or in triggering and retraumatization. Thus, in this moral framework for considering children’s appropriate participation in peacebuilding, considerations of safety dynamically interact with efforts to nurture children’s freedom while at the same time recognizing their unique capacity and determining appropriate responsibility.

![FIGURE 2 CHILD PEACEBUILDING WHEEL](image-url)
There are different issues to consider in each quadrant of the Child Peacebuilding Wheel. The Child Peacebuilding Wheel offers practical assistance in explaining a moral framework for considering the appropriateness of a child’s participation in different peacebuilding efforts.

The following questions travel progressively around the Child Peacebuilding Wheel in the order they have been discussed above and represent some of the issues to consider in each quadrant.

**Developing Capacity and Responsibility**

A. Physical Capacity and Responsibility
   i. What is the child’s physical capacity?
   ii. How is the child physically limited?
   iii. What is the child’s strength, endurance, need for sleep and food?

B. Psychological Capacity and Responsibility
   a. Cognitive capacity
      i. What level of complexity or simplicity of peacebuilding ideas is the child ready to learn?
      ii. What is his/her ability to consider the past and the future, and plan future events?
      iii. What type of ideas, and with what methods, does s/he have the ability to teach other children and/or adults?
      iv. What training would the child need to be able to equip others?
      v. With what depth can the child consider another’s perspective?
   b. Psychological Processes
      i. What is the child’s capacity for understanding emotions?
      ii. What is the child’s capacity for understanding psychological processes such as forgiveness, grief, grace, and repentance?
      iii. How developed is the child’s faith and in what ways?
      iv. How does s/he draw strength, security, confidence, conviction, and/or guidance from his or her faith?
      v. What is the child’s ability to evaluate his or her options, the potential consequences of each, and choose with delayed gratification?
      vi. What is the child’s depth of relational competence?

**Freedom to Participate**

A. Physical Freedom to Participate
   a. Destructive
      i. Why might the child feel manipulated or coerced to participate in this peacebuilding project?
      ii. Is there anything that may make the child feel they will lose relationship, resources, safety, or something else, if they do not speak or act in a certain way?
   b. Constructive
i. How is the child being given the physical freedom to build peace?
ii. Do they have transportation to peacebuilding activities?
iii. Are the child’s basic physical needs cared for?
iv. Does the child have peacebuilding opportunities that match his/her physical capacity?
v. Does the child have peacebuilding opportunities that connect with his/her faith community?
vi. Are there clear places for the child to be heard, and have his/her ideas valued and responded to?
vii. Are child peacebuilding opportunities available within civic structures that nurture the value of children’s citizenship?

B. Psychological Freedom to Participate
   a. Destructive
      i. Is there information being withheld from the child in order to achieve another’s ambitions?
      ii. How might the child be deceived about his/her peacebuilding role, his/her power or voice in a project, the impact of his/her activity, the true aims of the project, or about other issues?
      iii. What voices or forces in a child’s life may be discouraging him/her from peacebuilding or communicating s/he is incapable of building peace?
   
   b. Constructive
      i. How might we encourage the child?
      ii. Is the child offered a developmentally appropriate understanding of how her faith connects with conflict and peacebuilding, and his/her role in the two?
      iii. How might a child’s faith community nurture his/her spiritual development in a way that increases his/her peacebuilding capacity and freedom?
      iv. How might adults let the child know s/he is a valuable peacebuilder?
      v. Does the amount and type of conflict and peacebuilding information given to a child match the child’s cognitive and psychological development?
      vi. Does the peacebuilding education delivery method fit the child’s cognitive and/or psychological development?

Safety

A. Physical Safety
   a. What level of increased physical risk may occur in any of the following areas because of the child’s peacebuilding involvement:
      i. Location: To what degree may the location of the peacebuilding activity increase or decrease vulnerability or physical risk to the child?
      ii. Information: To what degree may the perceived or actual information the child gains through the peacebuilding activity increase or decrease vulnerability or physical risk to the child?
iii. **Association**: To what degree may the perceived or actual relationships or associations the child gains through the peacebuilding activity increase or decrease vulnerability or physical risk to the child?

iv. **Protection**: To what degree will the physical protection offered at or after the peacebuilding activity increase or decrease vulnerability or physical risk to the child? From what sources will the child receive protection?

v. **Capacity and Responsibility**: Considering a desire to appropriately increase the child’s physical and psychological peacebuilding freedom and the child’s physical and psychological capacity, what degree of physical challenge and responsibility is reasonable to offer to the child?

vi. **Freedom**: Considering the child’s physical and psychological capacity and potential physical and psychological risks, what degree of peacebuilding freedom is reasonable to offer to the child?

### B. Psychological Safety

i. Is past trauma delaying a child’s psychological development?

ii. Are peacebuilding experiences or information, which seem age appropriate, triggering past memories and re-traumatizing the child?

iii. Is the child psychologically prepared to for confrontation that may occur in a peacebuilding activity?

iv. Are the quantity, quality and delivery of information developmentally appropriate for the child?

v. How could the information be delivered with a developmentally appropriate method that helps orient the child to the issues without suggesting undue responsibility?

vi. Are a sufficient number of competent adults with significant knowledge of the children present, awareness of potential psychological risks, and knowledge of how to protect children from such risks supporting the peacebuilding activity?

The matrix of questions above is a tool that may be used to provide guidance to child peacebuilding mobilizers as they seek to hold appropriate tension between the different spokes of the Child Peacebuilding Wheel. As with a bicycle wheel, the Child Peacebuilding Wheel only functions efficiently when the tension is evenly balanced on all the spokes, and it cannot achieve its function without consistent progressive movement from one part to the next. If too many spokes are unattended, the wheel falls apart. If the wheel stays grounded on only one part of the wheel, and there is no consistent progression from one part to the next, then the wheel does not achieve its end, to travel far. Child peacebuilding projects will go far as they hold this triadic tension and consistently progress through the parts of the Child Peacebuilding Wheel.
REFERENCES


Youth Return in Post Conflict Northern Uganda: Sustainable Or Susceptible?

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ABSTRACT

The relative peace in northern Uganda, following the Juba Peace talks encouraged closure of camps and return of formerly displaced communities. The government of Uganda in collaboration with humanitarian agencies provided continued support to the returning population, thus transforming humanitarian assistance from relief to recovery. One of the major features of humanitarian aid has been focusing on household heads, women and children. Although I believe the above mentioned are special categories in their own right and deserve attention, this clearly spells out the youth gap. The youth gendered and age needs which are unique from those of other portions of the returning population deserve to be acknowledged. This paper puts forward a pertinent cause being directed to whether youths as a category group have been reached by the post conflict reconstruction programs in place. Very notably observed is absence of programs that specifically and tolerably target youth issues and concerns. I therefore discuss youth specific challenges emanating from their unattended needs while making recommendations for sustainable return. Outstanding suggestions point towards the role of religious institutions, cultural institutions and other forms of social reintegration.

Key words: Youth, humanitarian assistance, encampment and return.
INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses how youth concerns have been taken care of in the return process, and the challenges paused for the youth. While both female and male youth are constrained, this discussion accords special attention to the female youth given their multiple interlocking marginalizations as a result of not only age but also gender and other social defining factors including teen motherhood. Such multifaceted positioning places female youth more at a disadvantage as this paper will substantiate.

STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

In the introduction I give a brief on the northern Uganda conflict and the start of return and resettlement process, including the programs thereby initiated. Overall, I am drawing attention to the question of whether youth concerns have been taken care of in the return process, and the challenges paused for the youth. Given that youths are variously defined, I contextualize the definition of the concept youth in this paper. I adopt an integrative definition of youth as young people between 10-24 years and also hail the community or societal understanding of the youth. The definition notwithstanding, I underscore the predicament of the youth in northern Uganda whom this paper is focusing on. In this paper I hint on the unique positioning faced by the youth, which creates unique demands too, which I argue lack sufficient consideration in the return phase. I further examine humanitarian assistance during encampment and in the transition to post conflict. Despite the diversity in humanitarian assistance, I draw focus to food aid and reproductive health programs. Additionally, the paper presents an analysis of the age and gender specific susceptibilities for youth in post conflict northern Uganda. Lastly, I address issues of youth resourcefulness and skillfulness in accessing factors of production, as well as literacy through education and schooling as critical factors that defined youth reintegration in post conflict northern Uganda. In conclusion, I make several recommendations.

BACKGROUND

In 2008, northern Uganda witnessed the start of massive return of formerly displaced and encamped communities. This was subsequent to the relative peace created by the Juba peace talks between the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda in 2006. To facilitate the return phase, humanitarian assistance transformed from emergency assistance to recovery.
Armed conflict scholars have noted that while armed conflict ends, such wars always restart. According to Collier, over 31% of civil wars restart within 10 years (Collier, 2000). African conflicts are however, known to restart within less than a decade (Bigombe, Collier and Sambanis, 2000). The youth have been theorized as a security threat and thus a danger for the re-eruption of conflicts (Urdal, 2006). The conflict in northern Uganda may now be said to be in a post conflict stage. There are, however, fears of re-eruption in the coming years (Dolan, 2009). While focusing on humanitarian programs, I argue that the youth, whom theories of conflict largely consider to be a potential threat to (re)eruptions of conflict (Hendrixson, 2004; Lischer, 2006; Urdal, 2006,) are lacking specific attention from the reintegration programs and processes. Earlier researches argued that beyond any other subdivisions within society, young people between 15-25 years were bearing the highest cost of the 20 year war in northern Uganda (IRIN, 2007). Importantly, Ikemenjima (2008) has argued that youths’ strategic and practical needs such as educational, employment, and health care needs, if neglected may result into search for alternative sources of survival, some of which may be violent. Due to the poor standards of living the youth face, involving, extreme poverty and limited chances for social services like education, the youth are convinced to participate in rebelling forces in order to change the situation (Urdal, 2006). It is, however, important to note that, youth participation is not always voluntary since some are forcibly recruited into armed forces (Spitzer & Twikirize, 2013). I therefore argue that attainment of sustainable return in northern Uganda would inevitably necessitate an emphasis on the concerns of the youth. I agree with Schwartz (2010) that addressing youth needs during reconstruction is necessary. Attending to youth needs would facilitate not only national stability during the transition period but also future and sustainable peaceful development. I highlight paying strategic attention to youth especially through recovery aid programs in the post conflict settings like northern Uganda, as one possible breakthrough to durable peace.

WHO IS A YOUTH?

The youth have a dual identity. They are “a problematic, intermediary and ambivalent category, chiefly defined by what it is not: youth are not dependent children but neither are they independent, socially responsible adults” (Alex de Waal, 2002, p.15). The term youth in this study refers to young people between 10-24 years of age. By qualifying youths this way, I am mindful of the fact that the UN defines youth as all persons between the ages of 15-24. I also take note that UN has a generalized description of those persons between ages 10-24 year as young people, while recognizing persons between 10 and 19 as adolescents. On the other hand, the constitution of Uganda (1995) defines children as persons below the age of 18 years. The Uganda national youth
policy (2001) on the other hand defines youth as "all young persons, female and male aged 12 to 30 years". Like in many parts of Africa, the social setting in Uganda (Lira district), however, understands youth not as an age category but rather as a transition to adulthood. Researchers and scholars on youth have further noted that “the transition to adulthood is less the passing of an age threshold than it is the acts of taking a spouse and having a child” (Annan, Blattman, and Horton 2006. p.3). Based on those preceding observations, the article takes on an integrative approach to define youth as the young people between 10-24 years (youth and young people) while also appreciating the community or societal understanding of the youth. The terms youth and young people are in this article therefore used interchangeably to underscore the need for policies and programs that focus less on age (as a number) and be acquainted with, and as well appreciate the specific development needs of people as they changeover from childhood to adulthood. Youth should not be treated as a homogeneous category. Special attention is called to not only age but also gender and social location, and the interlocking oppression it creates.

THE YOUTH IN NORTHERN UGANDA

The youth in northern Uganda have undergone enormous challenges through the decades of the armed conflict since 1986 to 2006. While describing the situation of the youth, some researchers have referred to it as a lost generation: “...You can talk about a lost generation in the north of the country. Peace will remedy many problems, but perhaps not what the young people have suffered” (IRIN; 2007). It is this “lost generation” that this paper focuses on. Such a statement clearly states the need for a strategic plan targeting the youth for sustainable return and reconstruction.

EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH IN NORTHERN UGANDA DISPLACEMENT AND RETURN

Children and youth are direct targets of warring factions in contemporary wars. Machel notes that “While wars have always victimized children (and other non-combatants), the modern wars are exploiting, maiming and killing children more callously and more systematically than ever” (Machel, 2000. 5) Young people today find themselves caught up in multifarious conflicts that have multiple causes but with inadequate prospects for resolution (Machel, 2000). Most critically however is, whilst the causes of conflict remain largely unaddressed, the perpetuators capitalize on the energies, resourcefulness, enthusiasm and innovation of the youth to achieve the intended goals (Ikemenjima, 2008). Schwartz has acknowledged that conception of childhood and adulthood are altered by experiences of conflict. Tension is generated between the reality of children and youth as they assume adult responsibilities in conflict situations. In the various in-depth interviews and
discussion I held during this study, it was revealed that youths are involved in multiple roles that were not theirs prior to displacement. Such roles include; the headship of households, child labor to earn income for their families, taking care of their siblings, combatants and wives of combatants among other things. Situations like these are particularly challenging for youth. This is due to the economic and socio-cultural restraints that deny youth authority as grown-ups in the political, social and cultural community (also see Schwartz, 2010). Even though the adolescents have certain development competencies that distinguish them from the children, they, at the same time lack the social and personal attributes that define adulthood. This unique positioning faced by the youth creates unique demands too which have been under estimated in the return phase. The female youth have very particular susceptibilities including; rape, early and forced marriages, limited access to education and use of contraceptives. These are worsened in the post conflict situation given the breakdown of the social setting and neglect by post conflict reconstruction programs as this paper reveals.

During post conflict reconstruction, Schwartz, (2010) has noted that the sequence of youth programming is the key (Schwartz, 2010). I also argue that it is imperative to massively invest in youth development in post conflict settings, in order to prevent re-occurrence of crisis. It is critical to note that one of the highly accepted contemporary conflict theories (read youth bulge theory) has heavily pointed to high numbers of disgruntled youth as a security threat. Uganda on the other hand has 50% of its population below the age of 16 years (IDMC, 2011) which situates it at greater percentage of instability and violence. In the context of northern Uganda, this could be the re-occurrence of the settled conflict. Reintegration programs therefore have to ensure that youth energies are channeled positively towards sustainable development (Ikemenjima, 2008). Post conflict reconstruction has been focused on disarmament and demobilization as opposed to reintegration specifically the social reintegration aspects. Child soldiers have for instance been associated with notions of trauma and post traumatic stress disorders for which western-based psychological and/or medical treatment methods have been applied. This underestimates the background of the child and the cultural contexts which significantly influence the way people perceive and cope with trauma (Spitzer &Twikirize, 2013), which in turn affects the reintegration experience. Social reintegration strategies therefore need to be prioritized.

METHODOLOGY

This paper draws from the findings of a qualitative study aimed at conducting a gender analysis of humanitarian assistance programs in post conflict returnee communities in Lira district. While the
study was targeting women, a significant number of the respondents turned out to be female youth and even those that were above youth as per the study, also shared their youths experiences and also had primary information of how youth were differently affected by the displacement and return process. Data were collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and individual respondent interviews. Individual respondents were returning men (30%) and women (70%) randomly drawn from two purposively developed sampling frames (based on gender) that were extracted from local council lists. Key Informants were selected depending on their role as humanitarian agency employees (food aid and reproductive health programs), cultural leaders, and government officials.

**Humanitarian Assistance during Return**

A number of humanitarian programs that were implemented during encampment were continued during the transition to post conflict. The aid was, however, transformed from relief to recovery programs. Such programs included income generation, food aid, education, reproductive health, and infrastructural development among others. This article however, has been focused on food aid and reproductive health programs while examining the challenges the youth are encountering during post conflict reconstruction. Aid related to food security included training for improved methods of agricultural production, harvest and post harvest handling including storage and marketing. Reproductive health related aid included family planning, antenatal and postnatal care as well as training in nutrition for expectant and lactating mothers. While in the final analysis I do give generalized findings for northern Uganda, specific reference is made to Barr Sub County in Lira district.

**Age and Gender Specific Susceptibilities**

All the youth faced enormous challenges. The degree of effect however, varied based on the gender of the affected youth. The female youth came out to be more disadvantaged compared to the male. This analysis comes out in the following discussion.

**Sexually Active Youth**

Critical scrutiny of the reproductive health programs through in-depth interviews that I conducted during the study with key implementers like program managers revealed that youths were overlooked as sexually active and thereby requiring youth friendly reproductive health services. This affected youth access to and use of reproductive health services especially contraceptives and
condoms. Unwanted pregnancies were rampant not only due to voluntary sexual relations but also as a result of rape, exchange of sex for food, and general promiscuity. As a consequence, the youth especially the unmarried were more participative in abortion. Abortion is, however, also attributed to erosion of culture and social support system as a result of the conflict. Male partners were for instance mentioned to consistently deny responsibility for the pregnancies. Given the constrained survival mechanisms, girls were left with no viable option but to abort. The youth due to erosion of cultural values were involved in cases of delinquencies, street youth and use of drugs. While basic reproductive health services were provided through government health centers (Lira district referral hospital and health center IVs), as well as private medical entities like Marie Stopes-Uganda, health practitioners noted that the youth were reluctant to use the available services. A key informant noted;

_The youth are sexually active but they do not visit our centers for services. They (youth) think for example family planning services are for the married...many of them come to health centers after an abortion has gone bad, for instance when having serious abdominal pain and internal bleeding._

(Key Informant; Reproductive Health Uganda, Lira)

In Uganda, abortion is a crime and it is against the medical professional ethics to carry out an abortion. Besides, abortion is as well religiously and culturally unacceptable. As such female youth were involved in termination of pregnancies using unsafe methods like local herbs and use of detergents like “omo” and “Nomi” (Mulonga &Namuggala, forthcoming 2013). Such substances were not only cheap but also readily available to the youth without arousing any suspicion geared towards abortion in the neighborhood as it is highly stigmatized. Such abortion procedures, however, had disastrous long term effects that according to health providers at times resulted into death. Nonetheless, post abortion medical care is provided for even in government health centers. Conversely, according to the female youth, abortion was a viable solution to the unwanted pregnancies. One respondent while justifying abortion had this to say;

_...to be able to continue looking beautiful and young and therefore attract more men for food (which is provided as aid) and money through prostitution, Having a baby creates more burdens and makes one loose market._ (Female Respondent -Abunga Sub county)
**Survival Sex or Prostitution?**

Women (basing on the cultural understanding) most of whom happened to be youth (as defined by the study) offered sex to food distributors. Sex was used as a strategy to get enough food to feed their families. Sexual relations were also a strategy for preferential treatment especially during the process of food distribution. Food distributors’ partners would for instance not keep in the long-time consuming queues or at times would not even turn up for the distribution at all but would have their food delivered to their residencies by the partners. Important to note is that the youth dominated this kind of sex work. One respondent said;

*Some women especially the younger women do (have sexual relations)...because they still look beautiful and attractive...I don’t know whether it’s good or bad, but, what is better? Having your children die of hunger or offering your body and get food to feed your sick mother? No woman would want to be promiscuous but the circumstances demand so. In any case, you can even be raped for free...*(Female Respondent-Barr Village)

When food is distributed to household heads, many of whom are men, some sell it cheaply to make money for beer brewing. Others keep it in-kind and offer it to women after sex especially on the market days when women storm the town center to either sell or buy commodities. One respondent had this to say;

*Some women are not prostitutes because of money... but for food. First of all the money offered (in exchange for sex) is little ranging from 500 Ugsh. Can such money buy food for the family? Not even beans. One would rather go home with food other than such little money...* (FGD Akwo village, Abunga parish)

**HIV and Other Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

The behavioral changes in the community including abortion, prostitution and having multiple partners as the preceding discussion reveals exposed youth (both male and female) to high risks of infection and spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. This was due to the fact that limited prevention measures were being used by the youth. For instance while condoms were distributed for free, many youth especially the female never used them. This explains the numerous unwanted pregnancies and abortions. Hampered access and use was attributed to the poor attitude and misconceptions held by the entire community which translated down to the youth. Limited condom use was worsened by the unequal power relations between the female and the male. The patriarchal nature especially in social setting makes it very hard for the females to demand for a man
to use a condom. Moreover it was largely the male condom widely distributed which gave males an upper hand over sexual decisions. For the prostitutes, however, having live sex could fetch relatively more money; majority therefore chose to have live sex over the protected one. The desperate need for survival blindfolded the health risks involved in unprotected sex. A review of recent data released by the ministry of health ranked Lira district among other mid-northern districts with a high HIV prevalence rate of 8.3%. The report further notes an increased prevalence rate among women compared to men from 7.5 to 8.3% and 5 to 6.1% respectively (Uganda AIDS Indicator Survey, 2011).

Inadequate Resources and Skills

Since the conflict had taken over two decades, a decade of which communities lived in internally displaced people’s camps; all the youths I interviewed had spent all their life time in conflict and encampment. With limited movement and land in the camps, such youth did not get a chance to learn the agricultural and other survival skills. This rendered such people difficult to reintegrate in agricultural communities in Lango region. Due to lack of agricultural skills, many youth were not willing to live in the rural areas. They preferred to stay in the towns doing petty jobs like trade and informal strategies like prostitution. Humanitarian actors needed therefore to train the youth in agricultural skills in order to fit into the Lango agricultural communities and facilitate reintegration and sustainable return. With the exception of War Child- Holland, which was giving training and start up facilities in the form of animals (cattle and goats) to child mothers, many of the organizations providing aid had neglected the youth as a specific category.

An important resource among the Langi is land. Land is communally owned and culturally managed through the clan system (leaders). Male youth can access a part of the family land when married through allocation to start a new life. While this can favor the male, their independence is hampered which affects individual decision making. It is worse off for the female youth who can only access land through their husbands and fathers. It should be noted however, that due to post conflict cultural and social disintegration, women have managed to buy and therefore own land.

Education

While in the camps, respondents noted that schools were located in the communities’ vicinity which facilitated easy access by students. In the return areas, however, the schools were distantly located which created long distances for the students. Return areas in addition had few functioning schools, few teachers and inadequate scholarly materials including books and desks. Students were
discouraged from attending school. Food aid was therefore used to encourage attendance and retention in schools in the return areas through Food For Education (FFE). FFE program was providing food through lunch and holiday package programs to pupils who attended school. Travelling long distances through the disserted bushes frequently was reported to expose girls further to sexual harassment including rape. Other gendered impacts relating to education included limited access for the female child parents (read child mothers). While “child fathers” could still access education on a more regular basis, the child mothers were constrained as they had to take care of children with limited social support. It was for instance noted that such “child mothers” did not have anyone willing to stay with their children as they attended school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The post conflict reconstruction programs have not yet had the required emphasis on youth in northern Uganda. Young people have therefore been neglected in the delivery of health services, education, vocational training and life skills. They, however, continue to be the greatest hope and resource in the rebuilding of war affected communities (Machel, 2000). Their participation in community based relief; recovery and reconstruction programs will strengthen and sustain these initiatives while increasing young peoples’ sense of purpose, self esteem and identity. This can redirect youth energies positively to community development and halt the anticipated re-eruption of the northern Uganda conflict.

Education should be made more available and accessible to all the returning children and youth. School locations can for instance be physically situated in practically reachable places to minimize the long distances children have to travel to get to the nearest schools. Such locations will make access easy as well as minimizing female youth susceptibility to sexual harassment. The education provided should in addition to the formal curriculum be made culturally relevant for the children. Practical survival skills training should be targeted to equip youth with skills required for the survival in return areas. This will help the youth to reconnect with their cultural and social settings and in turn catch up with the socialization gap created by encampment and displacement. Education curriculum should be made accommodative of the various conditions including child parents.

Vulnerability is not an inherent characteristic of adolescent young women in northern Uganda, but was rather a direct consequence of the pattern of social life that evolved out of the encampment. Boyden and Berry still argue that such vulnerability is not all encompassing and permanent. For instance, while young women experienced sadness and pain, they revealed enormous courage during the conflict and remarkable resilience in its aftermath.
The cultural and religious institutions should be more involved in the planning and implementation of humanitarian programs as they understand the problems of their people better. Such institutions are also trusted by the communities and they are thus authorities. If humanitarian programs are to be sustained to meet the intended goals, implementing agencies should also find it important to use the support of the cultural institutions in order to identify the right clients. This can also help in coming up with programs that communities look at as relevant by first discovering the most pressing needs through their leaders. It has been noted that returning populations were turning to religious institutions to seek consolation and hope. Religious institutions were influential through encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation as well as tolerance in the community. That served as a psychological support for the returning communities. Religious groups had representatives coming in from Uganda’s capital Kampala to hold crusades. While the conventional churches were credited, it was noted that the youth were more drawn to the new religious movements including Pentecostals and Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Religious institutions in addition to preaching also distributed food items, clothes, shoes and scholastic materials for the students.

Youth friendly reproductive health programs should be set up and facilitated to encourage the youth to use these services. More family planning units should also be established in the region if the growing demand from the returning population is to be catered for. The literature relating to family planning and reproductive health should also be translated into the local languages for easy communication and interpretation. This would serve a lot in dealing with the misconceptions the communities have towards family planning and thus improve the health conditions as well as the standards of living.

It is the responsibility of the government of Uganda to maintain security and wellbeing of returning formerly displaced persons in northern Uganda. Government must therefore take strategic steps to increase availability and quality of social services in return areas especially for the youth. Social services in worrying need of improvement include schools, health centers and the police. Such centers can be improved through increased staffing, funding, infrastructure as well as supervision. Special focus should be accorded to sexual harassment. There is need for government to increase funding for the police if the laws especially concerning sexual harassment are to be fully implemented. Some of the detainees (sexual harassment offenders) have been released by the police on condition that they have nothing to feed them with. The victim is therefore responsible for feeding the perpetuator while at the police which has discouraged many of the sexually abused not
to report. Government should also train civil servants working in northern Uganda to be able to deal with the returning youth. Training should involve psychosocial support. Targeted trainees should be the police, teachers and health workers as well as the local leaders.

CONCLUSION

While it is important to prioritize gendered categories, I have argued further that humanitarian assistance programs should take up multifaceted challenged groups. A case being, the female youth who are simultaneously challenged by both gender and age which greatly affects their access to and use of aid. Important to note is that the youth play adult roles including household headship and income generation with limited social and political support.

Humanitarian actors need to treat young people as people having agency and therefore capable as positive social actors who can support not only violence but also violence reduction and peace building in post conflict areas. Children as well as young adults internalize, attach meaning to, and resist adult discourse, and in particular how they reconcile their everyday experiences with adult interpretations of war events (Boyden and Berry, 2004). If youth are acknowledged as threats towards causing armed conflict and sustaining its occurrence (Hendrixson, 2004; Urdal, 2006), then they should also be targeted as potential peace builders given the platform. The voices of the youth, their specific (age and gender) needs deserve optimal attention. It is therefore imperative to listen attentively to the voices of the young people, and understanding the meaning they derive from their lived experiences if sustainable stability is to be attained. Youths’ survival strategies, especially those that are less risky to both the individual bodies of youth and the entire community, should be acknowledged and supported. Olson argues that taking young peoples’ voices seriously means acknowledging their active participation in social life, their engagement within war and their suffering which continues during the post conflict period (Olson in Boyden and Berry, 2004). Listening to and working with youth would attain sustainable peace and return not only in northern Uganda but also other conflict affected areas like the great lakes region and sub Saharan Africa, as well as globally.
REFERENCES


Psychological Influence of Stigma, Discrimination and Social Exclusion among Children Deformed By War, Northern Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews existing literature concerning northern Uganda armed conflict with focus on children. It integrates different theories, conceptual and contextual analysis for proper understanding of the extent to which children were in integrated into armed conflict. Key informant interview with one of the rehabilitation centre, to obtain primary information. It explores the physical and psychological consequences and the perception that came as a result of the conflict. It examines the interaction between disability (deformity), stigma, discrimination and social exclusion. Attention is also given to the cultural belief about physical disability and the changes caused by armed conflict. A brief look at the return process and further insight into the Acholi traditional mechanisms of ‘mato oput’ and ‘Nyono tong gweno’ as common means of reconciliation and also a look at the relevance of the formal aspects. It then seeks to un-tap the valuable resources necessary to harness learning the social realities to minimize stigma, discrimination and social exclusion. Finally, the paper draws conclusion and gives recommendation for the way forward.

Key words: Disability, stigma, discrimination, social exclusion, child soldier

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Acronyms

ARLPi .......................................................... Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative
GUSCO ....................................................... Gulu Support the Children’s Organisation
HRW .......................................................... Human Right Watch
LRA .......................................................... Lord’s Resistance Army
NUDIPU ................................................. National Union of Disabled Persons in Uganda
RLP .......................................................... Refugee Law Project
UN .......................................................... United Nations
UNCHR .................................................. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee
UNICEF ............................................. United Nations International Children Education Fund
INTRODUCTION

Northern Uganda has witnessed more than two decades of civil war of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) which is noted to have ravage all spheres of human life from various aspects, with devastating effects, on men and women and acute effects on children as a vulnerable population (Refugee Law Project [RLP], 2002).

During the protracted conflict era, violence future in heavily inform of killings, looting, abduction etcetera (Dolan 2005).

Humanitarian agencies locally and internationally played instrumental roles in addressing the effects of this armed conflict (LRA) through rehabilitation and re-integration of the war victims (Akello et al 2006a).

Rehabilitation and re-integration is a comprehensive strategy of healing scars left on minds, hearts and bodies of victims (children) of armed conflict. The fundamental of this approach is to ‘normalise the altered/ learnt life (attitude, behaviour and feelings) caused by war experience as a new mode of learning in a child’s life to fit in the communities/ society. And to further manage the psychological influence of society’s perception that causes stigma, discrimination and social exclusion (negative perception) for effective copying of war affected children.

Akello et al states, that the two processes of rehabilitation and reintegration are commonly used to provide psychosocial support by both local and International Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) that is, GUSCO and World Vision among others.

The techniques applied at these centres incorporate two aspects; the traditional and the Christian values. The application of Christian values with the ideas to confess and repent of the sins, in order to encourage healing, a mean to forgive and seek refuge with God, in this process, prayers are done in line with Biblical teaching basing on one’s faith. While on the other hand, traditional cleansing methods geared to achieving harmonious living within the communities.

This paper examines and discusses the psychological influence of stigma, discrimination and social exclusion among children born normal and deformed by armed conflict in northern Uganda. It takes into account the various means of rehabilitation and re-integration applied by different agencies to ensure transition to a relative peace (in the mind and the communities). Further, consideration is given to children who suffered and continue to suffer the effects of armed conflict more because they did missed rehabilitation. Lastly, the paper makes recommendations for the way forward.
BACKGROUND:

*Impact of conflict on children*

According to United Nations (UN) Article 1, a child is defined as “a person below the age of 18 years”. Children in Northern Uganda have been increasingly subjected to greater traumatic experiences for more than two decades, as a result of armed conflicts (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 1997). Conflict to mean an act of violence among social collectives as Galtung (2002a) puts it.

Like in most conflict situations, civilians (children, youth, men and women and the elderly) are always the victims with devastating consequences. UNICEF (2007) identifies children as one of the most vulnerable groups, who have suffered severely from a range of human rights abuses in the course of the LRA war. Many were forcefully abducted, to become soldiers or sex slaves to commanding officers, with an estimated abduction rate of 25,000 by early 2007, since the beginning of the conflict in 1986.

Fulkenburg (2013, background section, para 4) referred to LRA war as “a war fought by children on children,” estimating that 90% of the entire forces constituted children. This war coursed with violent episodes, like any other armed conflict, however, with unique tactics involving unconventional activities that combines traditional African spiritualism and fanaticism and the slaying of civilians (RLP 2004). GUSCO (2004a) notes that abducted child soldiers were brain washed by Joseph Kony’s (LRA leader) teaching with claims that the Holy Spirit controls everything and speak through him. In this dynamic war environment, psychological and social experiences became shared throughout the LRA population (Avruch, 1998), with multitude of techniques applied on new recruits, such as initiated rites and forced killing (Ehrenreich R 1998); a welcome tool that robs off a child’s mind. The war experience (learning) became of applied kind, stirred by reward based on performance (major contributions) to the rebel ‘family’ (Boyden, 2003).

Not only did this new experience learnt during captivity, introduced the young fighters to what Ehrenreich, Rosa (1998 ), and Mergelsberg, Ben (2005) termed as “new normalcy” but it also became a coercion psychological compliance , a mean to infuse terror and fear in young children to conform to their (LRA) social norms, what i call “cognitive molest”. Perplexed by the expected norms from the leaders (commanders), a new form of learning to the new recruits, as applied by LRA fighters became the organising principle that a child had to conform to. In this new ‘rebel family’ like (Woldt A. L, Toman S.M (2005) referred to, where a person (child) is not meant to internalize the values by which he/she wants to live, but rather adhere to the bush culture through experiences and observations while obeying orders without questions.
For a child to function ‘well’, in such environment / situation, he/she has to abide by the order of the day that is; he/she is influenced by the environment (Lewin 1951), tethered to its notion of warfare. The unclear agenda of liberation instilled by the LRA commander, further worsened by eliminating parents, relatives and friends of the forcefully recruited children, was a move of, “no return”, painting a dark picture of home, for a developing child, which is alienation propaganda (Rosen 2005a).

The brutal process of forced killing or mutilating their own family members where the child soldiers are coerced to perform or witness (Rossana 2007) often torments the torturers themselves which further exposes and promotes the acts of violence.

Looking at the violent nature of child soldiers, it can be explained by Milgram’s theory of obedience which states that, a person view himself as not acting autonomous, but rather as an agent of authority, which shift responsibility to the in-charge, hence actor ceases to be guided by moral considerations but rather how well the commander’s authority is fulfilled. In this sense, attribution of responsibility promoted by the commanders often plays a central role in controlling the action and life of child soldiers.

Boyden (2003) put forward that, award of military power to child soldiers does not come on a silver plate, but based on major contribution, which suggest and explains the use of child soldier as a rapture in social norms. The motivated reward to power energises the young warriors to work harder. Consequences of the acts committed while in the bush, haunts the ex-LRA even long after return from captivity, especially those who failed to make it through rehabilitation centres.

Although different approaches have been devised in rehabilitation and reintegration of war affected children, many still faces adverse effects inform of psychological setback

**Conflict and physical disability**

Physical and psychological effects of war on children have been studied extensively, however, a gap exist in examining the psychological impact of war on children born normal and physically deformed by armed conflict, evident with unclear data/statistic. Given the nature of LRA warfare in Northern Uganda, it is literally undeniable that there are many children and adult with physical deformity in communities, consequent of armed conflict. According to GUSCO, (2004b) during LRA war, children have suffered major injuries from bullets, bombs, landmines, torture, rape, suffered from swollen legs due to long distance walking, and other forms of humiliation.
Today, Northern Uganda enjoys relative peace, the return of peace in the region is not a construct; there are no more rebel activities, that is, if we take peace to mean absence of violence (Galtung 2002) however, the presence of structural violence in terms of poverty, poor infrastructure, and worsened by posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, physical disabilities (Ovuga et al. 2008) still remains a problem. This violates the definition of peace, as many young people (directly affected by war) are not at peace with themselves or their communities, stemming from the fact that children in the region have grown up in a gloom of war, lived in extreme fear and with disfigurement left on people by armed conflict.

UNHCR (1994) states that support and services inform of physical rehabilitation, specialised education and social integration are usually not provided to landmine survivors, especially mobility of children with physical handicaps.

Fine and Asch (1988) explains in their third to fifth assumption that, “a disabled person is a victim, disability becomes central to the disabled person’s self-concept, self-definition, social comparisons and reference groups; and that having disability is synonymous with needing help and social support. Rehabilitation centres such as GUSCO and World Vision in Gulu report cases of child soldiers who are voluntarily or forcefully rescued from captivity through the centre, but little or none of those who went direct to their communities or arrested by rebels, amputed and left in the communities.

Disability has in the past attracted varying studies and discussions, to understand the way people perceived it in different societies. Idrees B. & Ilyas R (2012) emphasise that people with physical impairments are often significantly disabled, stigmatised, and have reduced quality of life. They are also socially and economically disadvantaged at all ages of life. This varying perception accrued about disability is not the same in all culture.

**Acholi perception of disability**

In Acholi culture, (Northern Uganda) to be born with physical disability is believed to carry an attachment to gods, literally referred to as ‘jok’ (an Acholi word to refer to gods). In this sense, bearing a child with physical disability mostly becomes a manifestation sign of jok, for the purpose of our understanding. Like Nabudere D. W (2012), Many Africans believe in one God, while others believe in a variety of gods and spirits. Well, that is as far as belief system is concern in some aspects. However, all have the same objective, which seek to explain where we come from and where we are going depending on a particular culture. To Acholi, bearing a child with physical disability (commonly jok) usually attracts performing of traditional ceremony. Because of this explanation,
the strangeness of disability in the eyes of Acholi people, already has it reference of attachment/explanation.

With the advent of LRA war, brothers and sisters killing one another, this often altered perception about the perpetrators of violence to take on the negative aspect, child soldiers, being at the forefront of the war, got heavily heat, as aforementioned (loss of lives and body parts resulted in physical deformity for many). It ushered in a difference in the perceptive notion of disability (mental and physical) both directly as fighters who carried out killings, and indirectly as civilian whose limbs were cut off.

Mentally, traumatised individuals (delusion, hallucination etc.) often attract reference to history of killings, especially for children who returned from captivity, while for the physically deformed is clear, as seen earlier.

In this war era, the notion of disability per se became removed from the concept of jok, as of Acholi reference, and tied to the concept of war (LRA).

In this case, being born normal and deformed by war means series of adjustment and copying with the situation; first, learning to cope with the structural settings which warrant a joint intervention of both medical and non-medical approach of physiotherapy and psychotherapy, as the psychological consequences is concern. As a child living with disability; the level of vulnerability is often fortified coupled with community’s perception of ‘returnee’, with all the labels and references attached.

Brett R, Specht L (2004) explains that loss of hearing, limbs and blindness can affect the reintegration of children into their families, communities and society generally. Pointing out that loss of sight or hearing can impede educational, vocational and social development, while loss of limbs limits the potential for economic productivity, a hindrance to economic reconstruction of their worlds. These children (disabled-survivors of LRA) are often seen by the community as being an added burden, contrary to added advantage, which often lead to marginalisation or rejection.

Secondly, discrimination, and social exclusion by both the communities and social structures often becomes the coercing factors to stigma (Scambler, G. 2009.), and other psychological problems, becomes a hard to escape factors for children who did not go through rehabilitation facilities.

Adjustment to the structure often takes period of time and, to change belief about circumstance of deformity is the journey to take, which goes beyond rehabilitation, especially at rehabilitation Centres.
**Psychological effects of war on children**

GUSCO (2004d), notes that people in many societies affected by LRA war, find it difficult to relate to former child soldiers, because of being scared of them, while others regards them as rebels. This is often attributed to the fact that some people in the society fear the acts of these children from captivity. The acts are manifestation of the learnt behaviour while in captivity. As explained in Bandura’s (1986) learning theory that violence exposes children to antisocial behaviour. Witnessing atrocities, civilian casualties, being wounded and being responsible for the death of non-combatants (Kanter J.S 1985) are serious exposures to trauma which pre-occupies memories.

Dodge (1991) explains that, after effects of war manifest in form of trauma which occurs because an individual is exposed to one or series of events that cannot be assimilated or integrated. To further reiterate, it is clear that the psychological influence of armed conflict on children is severe, and on the other hand living with missing body parts (disability) often defy ‘normal’ living. Society’s prejudicial reaction strongly influence personality development and identity formation of the affected children as the after effects of trauma may prove considerable damaging, influencing how they (children from captivity) view the world, as well as their responses to the social environment in which they find themselves. Therefore psychosocial intervention as a coping strategy contributes to balancing clashes of information in the cognition, held about the world and ourselves which evoke discrepancy hence resulting in a state of tension (Festinger 1957).

**War, disability and stigma**

Crossley M L (2000) notes that a person’s self-concept and sense of meaning in life emerges from interactions and identification with family and cultural systems; Having faced human rights violation at childhood causing to deformity leaves series of unanswered questions in the minds of a young child. Theresa S. et al (2010) further elaborate that child soldiers who have injured or killed others or suffered injury themselves during war, are most likely to have significant decrease in pro-social /adaptive behaviours.

Former child soldiers physically disabled as a result of LRA war have their identity affected or ‘spoil’ with powerful discrediting label (stigma), created by people’s perception as observed by Goffman E. (1990) in his study of stigma.
Similarly, Emile Durkheim (1982) and Gerhard Falk (2001), emphasis that Stigma triggers reactions which mentally classifies individuals with discrediting attributes. This undesirable stereotyping individuals rather than accepting someone as ‘normal’ based particularly on attribute, behavior, or reputation leads to social labels which subsequently connotes separation of “us” from “them” (Morone 1997; Harrison 1999). The perception of separation becomes an influencing factor in the life of children deformed by as a result of armed conflict.

Asch, S.E (1955) argues that when external pressure that exist in a particular situation are stronger than internal attitude, it impinges on a person’s behaviour, thus places inequality and internalised oppression in the working memory.

The challenges presented forward, forces the stigmatized person living with disability to become held back and receive fewer of the positive resources and more of the negative resources that the social environment offers, often creating negative thoughts. Link et al. (2001), Emphasises that stigma can erode generic coping resources such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, compromise coping capacity and influence stress-related outcomes even if the origin of the stressful exposure has nothing to do with stigma. When the extreme disapproval (social stigma) of a child with physical disability (on grounds of characteristics) that distinguishes him/her from other members of a society prevails for long, it often stain in the subconscious, hence manifest into worries causing severe psychological effects.

**Social exclusion and discrimination**

When the social environment crucial for development of a sense of self and well-being becomes broken, or carries negative regards from others, it leads to negative self-regards and social rejection.

According to a research by RLP (2005), social trust among the people of Northern Uganda has broken down profoundly; the social exclusion analysis in the context of the LRA war point out strong distrust held about the fighters because of the indiscriminate killing. Burchardt, T., J. Le Grand and D. Piachaud (2002) states that everyone makes value judgements about people/ groups other than their own, which makes social exclusion multidimensional. The perception towards children returning from captivity arouses different feelings and thoughts among people in communities (RLP 2005). Children abducted as young as 8 years missed formal socialisation in terms of education as well as community of their origin. Furthermore, social exclusion comes into play when people are faced with combination of linked problems, which are especially reinforcing. In this subject, children affected by armed conflict, suffered from both physical and psychological torture of enduring pain.
from amputation or landmine, coupled with society’s label on such individuals as killers, with reflection on the atrocities committed by LRA.

It is on this kernel point that Oliver, (1996) notes that, “physical impairment is not the hardest thing to live with, but the society’s responses, in terms of stigma and discrimination, that is most damaging.” The attitudes and practices of the community in general, may be prejudicial, which becomes the operating variables in promoting social exclusion (see Duggan, 2001). Betancourt et al (2008) also suggest that in most post-conflict situation, experiences of discrimination may significantly explain the relationship between past involvement in wounding/killing others and subsequent increases in hostility.

Rehabilitating wounds of armed conflict

Though there was no formal process of demobilisation for LRA fighters, various means became channels of return from captivity, such as being captured by government army, individual escaped or rescue during fight.(Coalition to stop the use of child soldier, Global report 2004). The violent engineered epoch (LRA insurgency) subsequently calls for a calculated move of a comprehensive rehabilitation which takes us away from simplistic efforts like family tracing, re-union of ex-combatants with their families, to a more fundamental aspect, namely “medical” and “self-healing” model (Macaulay C 2012a) and other means. The earlier involves the use of psychotherapy inform of drugs to reduce the psychosocial effects of war. While to emphasis on the latter, many things in the survivors environments are key factors in the recovery process from violence (armed conflict).

Rehabilitation involves ranges of theoretical and practical approaches, to promote physical and emotional healing for appropriate adjustment and feeling of acceptance within the self and in the society. It is a process per se which aid transition from military life, to civilian life hence allows a war traumatized child to return to ‘normal’, by adopting and adjusting to life, contrary to war experiences. Research by Rossana (R. N 2007) notes that for the process of adjustment to be possible, it constitutes the effort of the individual and community/society to play this role.

To mention, are basic needs such as food, shelter, drugs, positive social interaction and many others, which most rehabilitation centres ensure that they are met. Positive social interaction motivates some of the survivors to open up and often share their feelings and experience of suffering and surviving horrific abuses hence, reducing long term distress (Macaulay 2012b).

The idea of being in rehabilitation centres also promotes the concept of sharing (information and experience) through storytelling, a form of peer to peer support, which promotes empowerment of
survivors emotionally. This helps children learn to share similar experience with fellow survivors, which are sometimes difficult to talk about with especially family members.

A survey by McKay S and Mazurana D (2004) shows that “children who have been in armed conflict and did not pass through any reception and/or rehabilitation centres before returning to their families were less confident and more anxious, depressed and hostile than children who went through a program of rehabilitation. In some instances, issuing of certificate of pardon has been one of the means to ensure that the identity and security of children from captivity are safe from possible community revenge or any kind of arrest by security personnel (GUSCO 2004e).

Therefore, the intervention by Amnesty provides a general free environment allowing the community to be involved in the process of dialogue and reintegration without fear of retribution (GUSCO 2004f). It also seeks to address cases of those who do not make it to rehabilitation centres. In addition, noting the guidance of a rights-based approach, for example, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognizes the rights to life, freedom from arbitrary arrest, slavery and torture, this certificate becomes necessary especially in situations where return from captivity prompts resentment in local communities or from the government.

In an interview with James Ociti, centre manager, Gulu Support the Children Organisation........children who return from the bush and happen to pass through GUSCO reception centre, are rehabilitated prior to re-integration. Rehabilitation involves series of activities to address the social, psychological and other medical effects. This starts right from reception with briefing, to family tracing before reintegration. Fundamental in rehabilitation is the interim care where a child is offered medical treatment and basic needs, a foundation and pillar of strengthening the psychosocial support (counselling). Counselling contributes to addressing the negative emotional aspects of war, and it is a mean to prepare the children for future expectation during reintegration. This takes the form of family support talk, about life at home (community) and what they should expect....

....Structural activities among others, such as games and sports, justify the need for engagement in social interaction. The use of cultural dances (e.g. larakaraka-Acholi traditional dance), drama and various other indoor games, is the beauty of these activities which introduces returnees former child soldiers to the real life setting in the various communities where these children are meant to return. However, cases of physical injuries (deformity) which requires medical attention are referred to hospital such as Gulu Referral Hospital and St. Mary’s Hospital Lacor for special attention including orthopedic services from both hospitals. While severe cases which call for specialised surgery, means of support from other partners are thought. Because of the whole process, majority responds positively.
Reintegration and post reintegration follow up is carried to monitor the progress of the child in the community...

Considering the above steps amongst others, rehabilitation of child soldiers (returnees) takes into consideration society’s perception to healthy cope up.

**Reintegration in the community**

The question we are concerned about is, the way to go, in reintegration. Research by GUSCO found out that reintegration faces challenges of unending stigmatization, mistrust and segregation as some of the negative variables against former child soldiers. The response to these variables, call for elaborate effort required to address the concern of children who suffer from emotional distress or mental disorders as earlier on mentioned.

Similar to restorative justice which emphasizes repairing the harm (http://www.pfi.org), Reintegration requires local understandings of justice as based upon reintegration of offending people into society in order to handle it well (RLP 2005). This often contributes to avoiding the feeling of pay back, ‘an eye for an eye’ or retributive or any other punitive form of justice from escalating.

According to Joanne N. C (2008) traditional cleansing as an informal means of reconciling with the community makes former child soldier feel clean again and acceptable by the community after having killed, hence contribute to reducing ongoing risk factors such as stigma, revenge and daily hardships that would contribute to poor mental health outcome.

Norwood R.R (2007) also asserts that healing rituals present a holistic approach to health: they address the physiological, psychological and social dimensions of the suffering in order to heal the whole person. For the purpose of understanding this concept, Acholi Religious s Peace Initiative (ARLPI) stresses the richness of this approach to reconciliation elaborately that, ceremony such as ‘nyono tong gweno’ (stepping on the egg) crushing of the egg, shows how the offender’s sins has been cleansed as the Acholi tradition deeply believes in the purity of the inside of an egg. ARLPI continues that the egg will no longer produce and can never be put back together again after having been stepped on and crushed. In this regard, since the atrocities of war and the emotions they illicit are often difficult to communicate verbally, the symbolism of the ritual has the power to act as a reconciliatory tool.

This form of reconciliation is a wholesome method which involves the whole community accordingly, the purification of the child is seen as the purification of the whole village. This is

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important because people stop being afraid of the child and forgives him or her, for all the sinful things committed not in his/her will. It also becomes easy for the child to forgive him/herself after realising forgiveness by others in the society.

A re-integrative technique where child soldiers are equipped with technical and craft skills for self sustainability to reduce dependency after rehabilitation centres is important. This intervention has proved effective, for example, GUSCO’s training of 18 children in Biomass (GUSCO 2004g.) is a positive move. It does not only provide these children with income generating skills, but also a mean to foster social participation in community life. It furnishes the disabled child with the spirit of self-esteem and value in life. It often shows to the community that these children (former abductees) can still be productive in various means, despite the community’s perception of the negative aspect of child soldiers or physical deformity.

Those who happen to join or re-join schools, or get work experience social support and community acceptance which becomes a protective factor that contributes to improving mental health outcomes. (www.jaaccap.org).

While these children (former child soldiers) are reintegrated into their communities, not involving those who are physically deformed in different activities at families/ community level with a mindset that these children cannot participate equally like other able bodies, socially excludes them, and minimises opportunities for learning, as one of the crucial factor for development throughout growth.

**CONCLUSION**

Armed conflict in Northern Uganda devastated all spheres of human life. The effects are heavily felt by children, as they were the primary target for recruit into rebel activities. The experience of warfare subjected a big number of children to witnessing and facing imaginable act of human rights violation, both directly and indirectly. Though efforts of rehabilitation were tailored towards comprehensive reintegration meant to normalise the life of these children, the physical and mental effects still prevails long after the war.

It therefore calls for continuous effort from various communities and stakeholders to continue supporting the survivors of LRA war, in various aspects.
**RECOMMENDATION**

The challenges of living with deformity for children ‘born normal’, physically fit are a nightmare especially when the deformity is caused by armed conflict. Many children who lost their body parts, either through amputation or to landmines, the adverse effect starts immediately with endurance of pain.

- **Involvement of family members/ community:** It is vital that parents or caregivers, and other community members should be involved in psychosocial activities. It provides children with an external resource that contribute in un-tapping resources, necessary for a child’s development.

- **Support group:** Formation of support groups, or joining already existing one should be encourage to strengthen social and economic empowerment that can help disable children cope up well, especially through learning.

- **Peer support:** Peer support workers should be trained, some of the trainees should be former abductees who have already been reintegrated into their communities. Their experiences in adjustment (positive or negative) can inform newly reintegrated former abductees of the better means to live in the communities.

- **Research:** Research should be conducted especially on children deformed by armed conflict, to provide statistics that will inform service providers and policy makers, for proper planning.

- Families living with deformed former child soldier should be oriented of how to handle disability. This should be done by the officer from rehabilitation centres, before, during and after reintegration of the disabled child, with support from peer support workers. Support group visit should be encouraged to promote moral support and emotional wellbeing, and also find out how the child is adjusting. It is vital in building self-esteem, confidence etc., which is resourceful for recovery.
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Graffiti: A Powerful Innovative Weapon Broadening the Horizons of Social Transformation in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Kenya has witnessed a cycle of ethno-political violence before, during and after elections, since the (re)introduction of multi-party elections in the 1990s. This worrying trend threatens democracy, development, peace and stability. The devastating effects of the violence have various affected Kenyan children and youth. A section of Kenyan youths determined to prevent the country from receding to the violent conflict have (re)conceptualized and (re)formulated graffiti as an alternative weapon for social transformation. The physical space has become the rostrum of civic advocacy and citizen participation, as the youth (re)frame graffiti to engage the populace and political leadership into national consciousness and moral accountability. Through ethnographic research this study advances a typology of the unique contribution of graffiti to struggle for social change and contention, which is distinct from more traditional social activism and protests. In particular, the study explores the ways in which graffiti reflects a particular identity of youth agency, activism and advocacy that values daring, risk, rebelliousness, ingenuity, commitment, and sacrifice, while at the same time reflecting particular aesthetics that are adored by the public.

Key Words: Kenya, Youth, Graffiti, Social Transformation

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INTRODUCTION

Kenya has witnessed a cyclical upsurge of ethno-political violent conflict before, during and after elections, since the (re)introduction of multi-party elections in the early 1990s. The electoral processes, far from ensuring a peaceful democratic process has in fact heightened the existing tensions and in several cases fuelled violence. In the 1992 elections, violence spread across the country as politicians including persons closely connected with the regime had an interest in fuelling the violence (Roessler, 2005). The violence subsided in 1996, only to resurface on a smaller scale before the 1997 elections. While the 2002 elections were calm, the period leading up to and immediately succeeding the 2007 elections saw renewed bloodshed, as the country was almost engulfed in a fully-fledged civil war. Peace, order and stability were greatly compromised. In the lead to the 2013 elections, the risk of mass atrocities was potentially high in light of the past episodes of violence. Fortunately, Kenyans remained largely patient through a delayed and error-ridden voting and tallying process, with the exception of isolated incidents of violence (Sentinel Project, 2013).

The combination of historically poor governance, weak institutions, entrenched politics of exclusion, patronage, ethnicisation of Kenyan society established in the fragile context, and a highly fraudulent electoral process, have been identified as the main sparks that lit the tinderbox (Kanyinga & Walker, 2013). Among other things, historical grievances particularly around land ownership, unequal distribution of the national cake (resources and opportunities), and weak national institutions that are prone to political patronage and manipulation trigger the mayhem (Ruto, 2013), highlighting and exposing the fragility of peace and stability.

Despite some reforms in the country and international judicial proceedings against personalities suspected of organizing the 2007/2008 violence, many of the underlying drivers of violent conflict remain salient. The triggers rooted in long-term, foundational issues that remain unaddressed since Kenya gained independence in 1963 are alive to the populace. The ramifications of the violence and its implications for peace, governance, development, stability and democracy are phenomenal. The monumental impacts and brazen consequences have made it evident to a section of youths that Kenya should never be allowed to regress to such catastrophes in future. Consequently, they have (re)conceptualised, (re)formulated and (re)framed graffiti, a rather unconventional but innovative methodology, into an alternative tool for peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding refers broadly to what Heathershaw (2007) describes as activities undertaken to prevent violent conflict, address the root causes of violence and effect reconciliation. The presumption is that peacebuilding activities are informed by multiple forms and locations of knowledge, including what is known about conflict and peace within formal and non-formal institutions like families, schools, friendship groups, communities, support groups, and by children,
youth and adults. For peacebuilding to be ethical and effective therefore, it needs to be embedded in local realities, cultures and practices, validating and building on people and resources in their situations.

Exploring the image and reality of young people’s relationship with peacebuilding in Kenya, this study considers the difficulties, dilemmas and rewards of integrating their knowledge, resources, culture, images and ideas. It analyses the significance of the youth’s occupation of public space as a means towards developing both individual and, collective political and social agency. Specifically, it explores how young people use graffiti to create youth-led socio-political spaces in the midst of counter-cultural and political infrastructures. The study untangles how and why graffiti artworks are an important ally of peacebuilding in the form of peaceful protests, resistance, struggle, educational awareness and sensitizations. Considering the ubiquitous and wide range of graffiti expressions, the study examines graffiti as (a) instruments for recruitment, (b) for the management of emotions, and/or (c) as expressions of mass dissent. It expounds on the ways in which graffiti reinforces, rather than undercuts, a particular version of protest assertiveness that values aggressiveness, daring, risk, rebelliousness, ingenuity, commitment and sacrifice, while at the same time serving as a resource for constructing identity, aesthetics, achieving status and respect among the public.

The youth personify society’s deepest anxieties and hopes about its own social transformation. They play an important and even dominant role in social movements (Warner, 2002; Chaffee, 1993), which are usually the driving force behind social transformations. They are traditionally the most dynamic mediums, and key “engines” of socio-political transformation, if not always its primary “engineers”. When effectively mobilized, they provide much of the crucial energy and mass power to get wheels turning for divergent “vehicles” of socio-economic and political transformation.

Specifically, the youth’s use of space (Hall, 1980; Melucci, 1989) is integral to their development as civic actors. Building a young people’s movement and developing youth “empowerment”, for example, fundamentally requires that they (re)configure spaces, carve out new spaces, build links between spaces, occupy forbidden spaces, and inhabit traditional spaces in new ways. When they occupy these spaces, they disrupt open spaces and built environments and, thus, challenge leadership, power, authority, and their own and society’s subordination. It is in the midst of these public spaces that marginalized groups (Arendt, 1958; Melucci, 1996), connect with each other and with the politicized public, find and create youth-led spaces, and nurture a youth voice and presence. Consequently, this study considers the resource of graffiti as instruments for society’s transformation, generated by vibrant youth that emerges from their social interactions in shared spaces.
Though, public space has long been an important arena for democracy, a new wave of anti-establishment participation in public space graffiti has become the latest sensation in Kenya. The graffiti, driven more by forms of loyalty rooted in consumption, symbolism and aesthetic issues (Klimke et al., 2007), is the new channel for social interaction, citizen expression, free speech, public opinion, attitudes and values. Enmeshed in the graffiti are messages of sensitisation, education, advocacy, appeal and voice for public participation, effective governance and morally accountable leadership. The graffiti is without doubt a powerful movement and a driving inspiration for democratization.

Through these graffiti artworks the youth have emerged as an influential force in peacebuilding and nation-building. The youth attack elite corruption, poor governance, ineffective and unaccountable leadership which are a threat to the prosperity, stability and cohesiveness of the nation. The youth-led graffiti raise awareness about the benefits of promoting nationalism as opposed to maintaining entrenched politics of exclusion and patronage divides. In the graffiti are views, voices and goals that develop and seek to support a character of national unity, which will ultimately facilitate the end of violence, corruption, nepotism, and unequal distribution of state resources.

The graffiti is designed to help shape constructive attitudes and behaviours in national identity, collective empowerment and personal responsibility. It provides the building blocks for strengthening national identity by encouraging peaceful co-existence and mutual respect. The graffiti is designed to achieve this higher balance through education, and raising awareness, increasing knowledge, and moulding attitudes of the public regarding the acceptance of differences, as well as the shared histories, common goals and aspirations of the Kenyan people as a nation.

**SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONALISM**

Symbolic Interactionalism the theoretical perspective that deals with the conceptualization, design and production of objects, physical signs and symbols as primary means of interaction was used in analysing the graffiti. Madison (2005) argues that Symbolic Interactionalism is the concept that relationships between objects and people are based on assigned meanings, these meanings come from social interactions, and these meanings shift through an interpretive process. More specifically for Mead (1938), Symbolic Interactionalism is closely related to the way in which the life of a group or culture is constructed. He states that these interdependent relationships rely heavily on agreement on symbolic interpretation between group members within a given culture. The graffiti practitioners utilize symbols and objects as signifiers in order to understand others, and express concepts in the daily life of Kenyans. The symbolic expression generated is constant, literal and specific to the Kenyan culture.
RESEARCH PROCEDURE

While the participants for the study were purposively sampled, a combination of qualitative techniques including key informant interviews, focus group discussions, individual in-depth interviews, non-participant observation and content analysis generated the data. Art texts and murals often employ metaphors and irony, aesthetic and symbolic actions which constitute different features, meanings and emotions not plainly contemplated (Simons and McCormack, 2007). For this reason, a content analysis able to capture differences and similarities between mere art texts and political texts was designed. The coding system was designed to seize all the elements of the injustice frame, that is: we (identity), enemy and injustice, political aims, tactics for achieving the aims, divided in appropriate subcategories. The integrity of the research enterprise was maintained by adhering to the moral and ethical principles of doing research.

THE MEMORIALIZATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE’S ACTIVISM IN GRAFFITI

Street graffitists connect more intentionally with the public by using the everyday environment as an impromptu gallery and playground. Accessibility and readability by “outsiders” are integral to the agenda of the graffiti practitioners. The physical space is the canvass for voicing claims to citizenship or challenging existing damaged citizenships. The graffiti takes place as a canvas for its own protest, and a broader aesthetic invitation of public protest. The style of graffiti clamours loudly for a change to the contexts and conditions that allow for and encourage for the construction of oppression. The illustrations of these displays cover the physical space with slogans of uprising and protest that imagine the possibility of rendering oppression a threat of crumbling.

Graffiti Revolution: Art and satire in public space play important roles in democratizing situations. Gearing up to the 2013 general elections the youth in Kenya made the urban physical space the new “shrine” for graffiti. The Kenyan public was drawn into a raged debate around the “display of graffiti” on flyovers, underpasses, buildings, street junctions and walls, mainly within the city of Nairobi. The new form of revolution entered the Kenyan public space with a bang, and while graffiti is not considered as one of the enlightened ways of resistance, it is nonetheless an effective way of communicating to targeted audiences. The graffiti crew have since, become the voice of the people and the conscience of the nation upon which a revolution by and for the masses is inspired and driven. The crew use graffiti murals and texts to campaign and voice the citizenry’s frustrations with the country’s political establishment on issues touching on daily lives. They depict a political leadership class corrupted by greed that has failed to address major socio-economic and political issues. At times amusing and disturbing, the graffiti’s distinctive imagery displays a visual...
vocabulary that transcends language, religious, ethnic and class boundaries, and encourages new insights into the abuse of power, state corruption and aspirations for greater freedoms.

**The Graffiti Imagery:** At the centre of the murals is a display of the reminiscences of a greedy politician depicted as a big-beaked vulture, (a parody of Kenya's politicians), arrogantly staring at protesting citizens. The villain-like politician seated beside parliament buildings grinds his feet onto a woman’s head, commonly referred to as *Wanjiku* (symbolism for the common citizenry), as he memorizes how he hoodwinked citizens into electing him to the lavish position of power that he uses to impoverish the same electorate. The vulture recollects: “I am a tribal leader, they loot, rape, burn and kill in my defence, while I steal their taxes, and grab their land, but the idiots will still vote for me.”

Another mural depicts the ‘Vultures’ with one carrying a briefcase labelled “stolen loot.” The graffiti text reads: “Describe your MP vulture” but the word “MP” has been crossed out with red paint. A list of adjectives is given: “Thieves, irresponsible, selfish, pathetic, and missing in action.” Also lampooned in the graffiti are parliament buildings which are displayed as the space where citizens have consistently been plundered since 1963 when Kenya gained her independence. “MPs screwing Kenyans since 1963,” reads the footnote.

In yet another graffiti are face murals of historical iconic figures: American civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr., slain South African civil rights activist, Steve Biko, and Kenyan freedom fighters Dedan Kimathi and Tom Mboya. The graffiti seems to say: “Only the truth is revolutionary.” The face murals of great civil rights activists inspire sacrifice and defiant commitment to the cause of the revolution, for these are leaders who stood up and advocated for the truth and paid the highest prize; their lives, but ultimately the cause of their defiance paid off. Nothing and totally nothing can therefore stand between the truth and the journey for its realization.

Bonny Mwangi, the leader of the youths behind the graffiti said: “We are using images of a vulture Member of Parliament (MP) stomping on the face of protestors and parliament to tell Kenyans that when you sell your vote, you are mortgaging ‘our’ future—the young generation’s future. The images of personalities who led revolutions and protests against oppressors the world-over inspire patriotism, commitment to social justice and suffering for a just cause. If they could do it and succeed, why not us? We can also achieve. There is no challenge that is beyond our reach.” Bonny Mwangi continued, “We are trying to encourage men and women of integrity and character to vie for elective office because if they don’t, you will just find vultures on the ballot...If they don’t, we are doomed.” He intimated that the graffiti crew’s greatest fear is that people won’t pay attention, “I will be so disappointed because I am sacrificing my family comfort and sleep to do the graffiti. If we do all this and we don’t get the ballot revolution, it will be an...anti-climax.”
**The Scandals:** Through numerous murals painted in public spaces, and aided in circulation by both the print and electronic media—the youth not only interrogate the validity of certain decisions taken by the Kenyan leadership, but also question the legal-socio-moral grounding for such. The graffiti challenges the political regime on a host of rip-offs and scandals that have engulfed the country, and political mischief practiced by politicians. These include tribalism, land-grabbing, unemployment and economic scandals, famine, political assassinations, and the internally displaced persons (IDPS) resettlement scam. The artists stencil Kenya's known major scandals—Anglo Leasing, Goldenberg, the Maize Scandal, the *Kazi Kwa Vijana*, etc—all masterminded by a conspiratorial elite political leadership. The graffiti crew fuse artistic creativity with courageous commitment to the moral principles of accountability, thus effectively bringing out the anger and frustrations of the majority of Kenyans over corruption, poverty and inequality that make the country a tinderbox. The graffiti is like a lantern that the people look onto. In this way the graffiti crew have managed to get the voice of the people heard through shared spaces of human interest.

**Motivation:** What has inspired the graffiti writers to continue their artworks despite significant risks to themselves, both physical and legal? “Your enthusiasm to produce varies according to how you are feeling psychologically—what is going on around you—and how well you are physically. I am humbled by the culture and heart of people who cannot draw or write but who are sacrificing their lives for freedom,” Uhuru Betero enthused. For Swifo Simba, “The graffitist is the one who produces an idea, but if that artist is not living within the community and going through what the masses are going through, then the artist cannot understand what is going on there and reflect on it. To be a good artist, you have to express the feelings and experiences of the people you are living with. Art graffiti is all about living with your own people, and having a vision about what their concerns are. You can’t sit in your own room isolated behind your window and draw about life events.” Thus, the graffiti acts as a means to an end and not a purpose by itself.

Banko Slavo argues that, “Graffiti as a form of civil protest has some permanence which survives longer than street demonstrations—such artworks are permanent and effective works of civil activity. The idea is not to primarily create expressive works of art, but to present political, social and/or economic petitions, while at the same time calling on the people to act wisely by making good use of their vote in elections.” Smoki Lallah was more categorical on their use of graffiti, “I think our graffiti is a way of defining what our generation wants for Kenya. Traditionally artists have been considered soft and mellow, a little bit kooky and non-political. May be we are a little bit more different. We defend our people and our generation, and the generation to come we defend more fiercely.”
In other words Kenya’s uneven income distributions, chronic poverty and unemployment as well as the epic political struggles and socio-economic conditions which marginalise some groups of people, are the main engines that fuel the vibrant graffiti. In global terms, Kenya has one of the most uneven distributions of income. Laws and taxes change frequently. Such factors, Bonny Mwangi argues, “contribute to a very fluid society, riven with economic divisions and social tensions that underpins and feed folkloric corruption and space for the disenfranchised to protest. The street grafittists voice the grievances of the alienated.”

It is therefore clear that on top of the artistic expressionism, the graffiti crew as social activists and artistic individuals use graffiti as a movement and as instruments to articulate the socio-political and economic concerns of the citizenry. These instruments are generally favoured because the group feels marginalised by the political mainstream. The group also justifies their activities by pointing out that they do not have the resources or sometimes the desire to buy advertising space to get their messages across, and that the “political formation” controls the mainstream press, systematically excluding their often ‘radical’ and alternative points of view.

Public Conscientization: The changing form of civic activism and legitimation of graffiti show a striking increase in the weight given by citizens to the health of democratic governance. The new form of citizen participation (re)defines the issues, and emphasizes the populace’s concerns and champion over specific issues. Active citizen engagement leads to better and well managed state institutions (the judiciary, the police, schools, welfare, roads, etc.). Moreover, like religious participation, political and civic participation increases a sense of community and ties people more closely together.

Through the graffiti, the public are left to contemplate reality and in doing so, are able to engage in a critique of society. The graffiti crew have tightened battle against ‘vulture’ politicians, in a graffiti revolution they hope will ‘conscientise’ Kenyans to ditch politicians widely viewed as corrupt, ineffective and divisive. “When people are going to work, they see this,” Bonny Mwangi says, “and they remember, my member of parliament is an idiot, a thug, he stole our land.” The graffiti crew spends the night stencilling “vote the vultures out of parliament” on street junctions and every available physical space.

The graffiti does not target only MPs: “Corporate Kenya join us in speaking against tribal politics. Stop sleeping with the vultures,” reads graffiti stencilled on the wall of a public toilet. A little lower, is a message for the technologically savvy and middle-class citizens: “Middle-class Kenyans get off Twitter and Facebook and do something positive offline.” The graffiti crew rant and rave of how some Kenyans are “selling their souls for money” since they are now working for the “corrupt, evil Vultures.” “The people you are working for bled this country through corruption and you know it.
Why do you want them to assume leadership again? Curse the Vultures for ruining our youthful dreams. Do not sell your souls to them,” laments Bonny Mwangi. The graffitists have a sharp stinging message to the electorate: “Be wise and choose only leaders with the best interests of the nation in their heart.”

**Why Vultures?** The assault by the ‘art terrorists’ has revolutionized the style and content of graffiti; making their work largely satirical of the sociological state of the nation and political leadership, and often using vultures and other such-like predator animals like serpents as motifs. The graffiti crew describe politicians using the symbolism of vultures, “because with their predatory appetites, politicians like vultures thrive on scavenging, cannibalising and feeding on the weak, the poor, the dead, the marginalised and the most vulnerable in society,” sums-up Uhuru Betero. While not exhaustive, the graffiti gives a sense of the millenarian and rebellious spirit, tempered with a good sense of artistic wit, as the artists remind Kenyans of the many social injustices and other high-profile crimes committed by politicians. And their message to the public is clear: “We want visionary and patriotic leaders who are solution-oriented and in touch with the realities of the people. A leader must be dedicated to serve, be competent and not corrupt.”

**THE GREAT DEBATE**

The viral spread and rise of graffiti from an activity that usually involves the illegal defacement of public and/or private property to consecration as legitimate tools, instruments and weapons for political protests, civic activism, and collective conscientization as earned the practitioners general hostility from the authorities and individuals whose property is scarred, and admiration by the public whose concerns are articulated. The graffiti is produced and controlled by actors who are low in other resources like financial endowment, political office or official trust. Accordingly, as its value increases, debate over controlling its production, distribution and consumption has reshaped politics and public debate. The question as to the substance of graffiti in inspiring social transformation is based on, if graffiti is art or vandalism.

**Graffiti as Art:** On the one hand, is the more complex example where graffiti is an art form and part of social commentary, conversation and debate: a constitutionally-protected form of expression. It expresses a particular practice and forms just one tool in an array of resistance techniques. The graffiti is hilarious, and actually speaks to you in one angle or the other, that you end up having a conversation with the artworks. They depict social, economic, and political life of Kenyans. They bring to light what Kenyan politicians keep in darkness. The graffiti addresses issues such as corruption, tribalism, land-grabbing, tribal-clashes, political assassinations, and other high-profile criminalities committed by the Kenyan elite. The cool graffiti emphasizes the need to transform the
country by voting in good visionary leaders, but the political class; the target of the graffiti, is up in arms against the graffiti crew. Instead of the talented artists staging street demonstrations to express the ills bedevilling the Kenyan society, they use graffiti to educate the public on matters of governance, leadership and provide a way forward. The graffiti depicts how Kenyans are fed up with the political elite treading on their rights.

**Graffiti as Vandalism:** On the other hand the conventional view propagated mainly by those in positions of power and leadership, see the graffiti as part of a subculture that rebels against authority. It is an organised criminal activity, bedecked in revolutionary, anarchist, situationist slogans and attitudes. This proposition attributes urban decay and decline to signs of disorder, and signs of disorder such as graffiti signal a perceived lack of control in the community. Therefore, graffiti is not art; it is a crime that requires injunctions. Restrictions, controls and injunctions on the activities of ‘gang graffiti’ are designed to address and protect the public and private physical space from damage and vandalism.

**Authorities’ Response:** Graffiti in Kenya is largely viewed as a crude, underground, rebellious and illegal activity by the authorities. The Nairobi city authorities saw a threat to social order and public safety in the graffiti. They depicted the graffiti as an offensive expression, even as they adopted a strategy of criminalizing graffiti in general. They moved to cover the graffiti with blue paint, and wrote a “No Graffiti” sign on it. The authorities summoned the graffiti crew for interrogation, as it contemplated preferring vandalism charges against them. This led to a public outcry and debate on the lack of government tolerance, and in support of freedom of expression. But the authorities were emphatic: “At its best graffiti is just a way for immature vandals to seek notoriety and at its worst it is messages between rival gangs and drug dealers.” And the authorities were strongly dismissive of the freedom of expression rationale: “I have a message for the graffiti vandals out there—your freedom of expression, your freedom of information ends where my property begins!” The authorities maintained that graffiti “degrades the urban fabric” and “soils the public space.”

**Defiant Activism:** However, as the authorities increased their crackdown on the graffiti crew, politically-charged, socially-driven and multihued murals and texts kept appearing on the cities’ physical space. In the development of the graffiti are heroes, heroines and pioneers who have to battle against the forces of social control. Thus, the graffiti assumed a radical activism character that continues to include hints of rebelliousness and machismo. It has become a resource for the construction of a revolutionary identity. The roots of the graffiti are in the experience of poverty, marginalization, minority status and grand corruption. The artists employ graffiti to urge Kenyans to get rid of ‘incompetent’ and ‘corrupt’ political leaders at the ‘revolution’ of the ballot and by the power of the vote. Arrogant governance, mismanagement and ineffective leadership are therefore
at the heart of its credibility. The humorous but informative art is revolutionary in slogans and murals, as it galvanises the national psyche into what the graffiti baptises the ‘Unga Revolution.’ The Revolution is christened Unga (Swahili for flour—the staple meal for Kenyans) symbolising that it is envisaged to be a revolution of those who sleep hungry versus those who eat to their fill, it is a revolution of the have-nots against the haves, it is a revolution of the poor against the rich and the wealthy, it is a revolution of the oppressed against the oppressors, it is a class revolution—it is a revolution against inequality in Kenyan society.

“Our graffiti is revolutionary, in my opinion,” says Uhuru Betero, “and any revolution must be considered a crime.” Even with the threat of arrest and confiscation of their tools of trade, the graffiti crew were defiant: “We will go back and paint again. We won't give up. The guys in power have been raping this country for as long as Kenya has been there. We speak for Wanjiku (Kenyan symbolism for the ordinary citizenry). We want to tell the story of Kenya with graffiti.”

Who are the Graffitists? The graffiti mode of civic participation emphasizes activities that require some personal competency and commitment, and which involve some form of individual expression. These activism and advocacy is more private and self-determined, though it is also collective (like inspiring protests). While there is clear overlap with institutional engagement, this form of civic engagement is less bound by the needs, interests, rules, and routines of institutions, and, ultimately, is more focused on the individual voices of the masses.

The youthful artists in thought-provoking graffiti merge their creativity with modern technology to highlight society’s socio-political and economic concerns. As instruments of social activism, the graffiti is sophisticated in terms of being a technologically savvy and innovative. The graffiti crew aim at bringing about a ballot revolution by urging Kenyans to kick out a political class accused of, a protracted record of corruption, and exploiting shared inequalities and tribal differences to win power. The crew decries a culture of impunity among the political elite, many of whom have been tarnished by corruption scandals that emerge regularly with lasting consequences for the masses. The point is that good leadership starts with the citizens and the power of their vote—who the people vote for matters. For the graffiti crew, the decision solely rests with the Kenya masses; they should vote in the right people for leadership and rout out the vultures.

Echoing the words of the 35th American president, the late John F. Kennedy: “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country,” the graffiti crew pose, “Kama Si Sisi...Ni Nani?” Which literally translates to, “if it is not us, who else?” Uhuru Betero declares that the graffiti, “Is for a cause, a revolution, we have to wake up people’s minds...and a picture is worth a thousand words...If it is not us, it won’t be done. We have the resources, we have the skills. It’s now.” Banko Slavo concurred by describing the graffitist as “the activists with artistic sphere of influence.”
The graffiti crew concluded: “All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration. We are the ones we have been waiting for.” This philosophy propagates the idea that it is Kenyans to choose and decide the future for themselves.

**Public Support:** A strong alternative public view supports graffiti as a legitimate and powerful form of social, economic and political protest. As one pro-graffiti advocate put it: “Nowadays, public spaces are reserved for those who have enough money. Advertising dominates the urban public space and we are constantly bombarded with slogans from corporates everywhere we go...Architecture and the streets are shaped by commercial interests, not by the residents of the city. It is impossible to avoid, the public have no access to these spaces, that is, unless we (re)claim them for our own... Graffiti art are the only ways that citizens can interact and own public spaces actively. These art forms can, for example, express emotions, give critique on current leadership, politics or society, or just offer venues for public skill.”

The graffiti was also seen as an alternative source of news, sometimes credible information. The argument is that formal public spaces (including the media) have an exclusivist character based on, among others, expense, accessibility, knowhow, political, social and economic realities and networks, and legal restrictions. Graffiti provides those who are excluded in this manner with the avenue to challenge the exclusion and articulate their aspirations in a simple and accessible way. In this manner graffiti informs, reinforces and amplifies public demand for change at minimum cost and at a level that provides for greater inclusivity. To reinforce this alternative perspective, Banko Slavo quipped: “Mainstream media will never say a word of truth. In 2007/2008 when our brothers and sisters were falling to the bullets and arrows of violence, insecurity and rape, the mainstream media and the vultures remained mum about their stories.” He wondered: “Who will defend *Mwanachi*? We use graffiti as an alternative channel to mainstream media, to disseminate the true information, which they often keep back. We will somehow succeed.”

A number of Kenyans considered the somewhat radical graffiti to be quite attractive, both in the way the simple yet stinging messages was delivered as well as impressed by the sheer boldness of the gesture. They welcomed the graffiti as the new instruments of conducting civic education, saying the artistry should be bedecked all over the city and be allowed to flourish to other urban centres as well. “The graffiti tells the truth about how we have been taken for a ride by our leaders for a long time,” said businesswoman Nyiva Mwende. Motobo Makara, a businessman next to one of the murals, confirmed that many people had thronged the place to admire the graffiti and virtually all were beholden. “Many people have trooped and jammed here to have a look at the paintings. I have a feeling they like the messages. This is a good teaching, because for long politicians have taken us for fools to be swayed around,” he said. Reading through the graffiti, Mrs Nyuka Waudo
nodded in agreement as she was clearly amazed at the injustices the political class has committed to its own people.

Some members of the public were clearly grateful, liked the graffiti and saw some promise of talent and opportunity beyond the murals. “How did they do that? Surely, we should give a chance to these kinds of talents which can be natured and help our country to create job opportunities,” Jemimah Nyankura opined. Many people disapproved the authority’s move to summon the graffiti writers as autocratic and defended graffiti as a form of expression to be protected. “Graffiti is an avenue for the downtrodden to shine and sparkle,” Kimmende Harrisson shouted in fury. “The truth hurts,” Modobo Makari, a member of the public, told the researcher at the site of one of the murals. “They can deface the murals but they can’t stop the messengers of truth,” concluded the graffiti crew.

The cost argument of the graffiti also generated debate but Jemimah Nyankura was quick to respond: “While complaining about malicious damage, the authorities clean the spray-painted and pasted walls, just to see them painted again. It would be a much more effective use of public resources to invest the money used for the cleaning in workshops and painting lessons, in order to raise the quality of the graffiti.”

Public Opposition: However, not everybody was excited. Some members of the public found the graffiti to be untidy, offensive, and invasive. Reacting to the graffiti Kemmunto Kelly commented: “I wasn’t inspired… I was saddened. I was becoming so proud of my city. The streets are being cleaned, park benches installed, and beautification is being done everywhere. The city was truly becoming the once famed city in the sun. There are many ways to make a point, desecrating our beautiful city is just not that makes me rally behind your cause. Sorry.” Sumanga Sasana reacted in outrage: “We should not allow this to happen in our city…graffiti makes the city look neglected and residents feel unsafe. When people see graffiti of any kind, they think it’s dangerous.”

Interestingly, these same attacks are rarely levelled against other forms of public art that are commercialised, for example billboards and posters. Yet, it all boils down to taste. So, why is it that we are prepared to tolerate the forms of commercialised art that we find distasteful but not graffiti? Whose opinion of ‘cleanliness,’ ‘desecration’ and ‘beautification’ are we pandering to?

Is Graffiti Art or Vandalism? Are these youths who use graffiti to champion the cause for social justice and good governance; victims, perpetrators or both victims and perpetrators of crime? Above all, should graffiti be seen as a symbol and/or instrument of freedom... freedom of speech and information...from hunger and poverty...freedom from corruption...freedom from dictatorship, tyranny and oppression...etc? Nevertheless, one thing is final; we must recognise the symbolism of graffiti as an alternative avenue for social transformation and in this sense, welcome it.
Future Action Plans: The graffiti crew’s wider peacebuilding action plans include documenting and screening documentaries urging reconciliation, unity and nation-building. They also hope to host youth forums to try and engage them into citizen democratic participation. In these innovative and creative expressions, the crew anticipates to explore the themes of people inclusion, participation and mobilisation. This will hopefully empower the masses even as it helps individuals tap into their ‘inner voices’ via their own active as well as latent creative ability.

CONCLUSION
Given the deeply-rooted concerns in Kenya’s political economy that trigger violent conflict, there is need for persistent engagement by Kenyans, both young and old, in long-term peacebuilding. Continued engagement in peacebuilding would establish a strong foundation which will sustainably transform society for peace and democratic governance.

Citizen participation through art graffiti provides alternative but innovative avenues for society’s social transformation. This is because graffiti can be instrumental, expressive or aimed at achieving social change (Edelman, 1995). Art for advocacy and protests makes a unique contribution to resistance. In particular: (1) art in protests values individual, along with collective empowerment, among disadvantaged groups. In contrast with “politics by other means”, art addresses the intimate, not only the public dimensions of social problems and resistance, providing an alternative to macro-ideologies which do not take into sufficient consideration the importance of subjectivity; (2) art represents an alternative resistance which ignores political arenas and prefers to concentrate on a resistance which works on forging different types of minds. Speaking of deeper, more universal concerns and emotions than the specific ones associated to the political issue at stake, art allows a resistance which avoids politics and their mundane rules but is still interested in having an impact on socio-political and economic concerns. In other words, art in protests seems to be an intellectual answer to resistance emotions and understandings which the “traditional resistance” fostered by protest leaders does not take into consideration. Artistic expressions are therefore, neither just instrumental nor just emotional/expressive; in contrast, they represent different understandings and intellectual articulations of the advocacy movement.
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Enabling Support Groups Among Refugee Children

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ABSTRACT

Refugee regimes tend to focus on support to individual refugees children, and in the process further disable the relationships between individuals and broader communities. Given this overarching dynamic, formations of support groups for refugee children offers an important counter-balance and prospects of (re)-establishing community and social relationships, fighting exclusion and challenging the conventional individualization of refugee children.

Nonetheless, group formation and consolidation poses numerous challenges to conventional practice. This paper is based on extensive experience of interacting with support groups in Kampala.

The paper explores two case studies from child rights support groups hosted by Refugee Law;
- Manchester United Child Rights (8-12yrs)
- Freedom Child Rights Group (13-17yrs)

This paper discusses the benefits of collaboration and explores how refugee children maintains a support group and what role external actors can best play in this process, without co-opting it.

Key Word: Support Groups for Refugee Children
INTRODUCTION

Refugee regimes tend to focus on support to individual refugees, and in the process further disable relationships between individuals and broader communities of interest. Given this overarching dynamic, the formation of refugee support groups provides an important counter-balance and offers prospects of (re)-establishing community and social relationships as well as filling important gaps in the support available from non-refugee stakeholders. Nonetheless, group formation and consolidation pose numerous challenges to conventional practice of refugee assistance.

This paper is based on extensive experience of interacting with emerging refugee support groups among urban based refugees in Kampala, Uganda. Using Manchester United Child Rights (8-12yrs) and Freedom Child Rights Group (13-17yrs) as case studies, the paper explores the challenges of group formation in a context where support group members are dealing with very high levels of individual trauma and varying degrees of socio-economic and political exclusion.

The paper particularly looks at how individual refugee children are brought together to support one another practically and psychologically, and in the process establish new social and political spaces and, through working for common goals, reframe their experiences into sources of strength and identity. It explores how refugee children of different nationalities and background maintain groups of more than 50 people under structured leadership, and what role external actors can best play in this process, without co-opting it.

This paper further elucidates how group dynamics impact on socialization and team building among refugees children, how individual refugee children response and cope with in-group conflicts, and how these responses impact on the sustainability of the group.

THE INDIVIDUALIZATION OF REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

The individualization of refugee assistance occurs at different levels. The process of flight itself destroys social network and social support systems. People lose social connections because they are uprooted from the social spaces they grew up in, and are forced to flee and survive alone or with nuclear family. Although some degree of connection can be (re)-established in exile, for example living in proximity with refugees from other countries, attending churches and doing some activities together, often there are serious obstacles to re-establishing these social systems and networks especially for refugee children who sometimes happen to be un-accompanied.

A major obstacle for refugee children who have suffered sexual violence and rape is that ‘Blame the Victim’ cultures are as prevalent in the country of asylum as the country of origin. Many refugees, because of the nature of what has happened to them, thus seek to deal with their personal physical
insecurities alone, and in the process find themselves in a state of marginalization and exclusion, and struggling with feelings of ostracization due to taboos carried over from their countries of origin. This is very much the case for male refugee children who have survived sexual violence, for it is a taboo to talk about such experiences both in country of origin and that of asylum.

The combination of legal gaps, social stigma and lack of appropriate services mean that refugee minors who are survivors of torture and sexual violence do not have safe social spaces to talk about issues that affect them. Refugee children are therefore excluded from a wide range of services because they cannot find safe spaces to express themselves. To compound the lack of safe social spaces, survivors also lack voice with stakeholders like Office of the Prime Minister, United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Refugee Law Project and InterAid.

From a legal perspective, the individualization of refugees can be traced back to the 1951 convention which is a cornerstone of the international system for protecting refugees. The Convention’s definition of a refugee \( \text{126} \) basically focuses on individual cases of persecution and reflects the concerns of post-war Europe. Even though one of the grounds for the grant of refugee status is “membership of a particular social group”, the provisions of the 1951 convention have little to say about how the benefit of membership of a particular group can be re-established while in exile.

The UN Refugee convention was broadened in 1969 by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to include those forced to leave their native countries, not only because of persecution, but also due to ‘aggression, occupation by an outside force, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing the peace in a part of all of the country of origin’.

In 1984, Latin American countries adopted the Cartagena Declaration \( \text{127} \) which extended the OAU definition to include victims of ‘massive human rights violations’ and acknowledged that any person fleeing war and insecurity qualifies for refugee status enabling many people who would not have been covered by the 1951 convention to benefit from international protection. This modified definition covers people of large-scale exodus where it is impossible to examine every individual

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\( \text{126} \) The 1951 Convention defines a refugee as “Someone who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”

\( \text{127} \) The Cartagena Declaration enlarges the refugee definition to include “...persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalised violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order”. While the Cartagena Declaration is not a treaty, its provisions are respected across Central America and have been incorporated in some national laws.

Retrieved from http://www.refugeelegalaidinformation.org/content/cartagena-declaration-refugees
request for refugee status. In such situations the so-called *prima facie* procedure enables groups of refugees to be recognised collectively and to receive aid and protection from the host state, UNHCR and the international community at large. However, the broadening of the definitions has done little to destabilize the practice of focusing support on individuals rather than enabling the (re)-establishment of social support systems and the attainment of life as a social being.

The refugee system tends to put refugee children in a place where they are helpless and dependent on assistance from refugee serving agencies and service providers, and where existing capacities and future potential are little considered. The result is the creation of dependency – when someone come to believe and expect that the only solution to their problems will come from humanitarian organisations like UNHCR, InterAid and Refugee Law Project among others. One manifestation of this tendency is the fact that most refugees in Uganda see resettlement to a third country as the only ‘real’ solution to their plight and many appear to see the first country as a limbo in which they cannot do anything except wait for resettlement. However, many refugee children have to be attached to caregivers’ elders file for resettlement yet they don’t have power to influence any decisions. The best interested determination is often affected by many circumstances beyond children’s control basically because of the composition of the team.

However, while the system renders individuals dependent, no single organization is able to deal with every refugee children’s problem. The gap between demand for and supply of services is huge, leaving many refugees in difficult circumstances and reduced to moving from one office to another in search of solutions to their problems. Refugee agencies have different mandates and areas of work while others are ill-equipped to offer a wide range of services. In Refugee Law Project for example, it is easier to spend hundreds of dollars or even thousands on medical treatment of a refugee child than to give a dollar for feeding, despite the frequently asked question “How do I take my medicine on an empty stomach?”

The asylum and refugee support systems do not deal with the fact that for many refugee children, one of the biggest losses associated with flight or exile is the family and community which used to provide so much support. The system doesn’t deal with the fact these refugee children were usually situated within a strong social and emotional context prior to flight. The loss of that social context itself is a major source of ongoing trauma to the many refugee children and has a huge impact to their psychological wellbeing, socio-economic functioning, and overall resilience.

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129The tendency to emphasize people’s problems and weaknesses, rather than their skills and potential, is manifested in the existence of needs as opposed to capacity assessments.
UNHCR, in its Handbook for Self-Reliance, recognizes that “Traditional humanitarian/relief assistance is increasingly viewed as undermining the capacities of individuals to cope with crisis. It leads to dependency” UNHCR (2005:01). It defines self-reliance as:

“The social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet essential needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity. Self-reliance, as a programme approach, refers to developing and strengthening livelihoods of persons of concern, and reducing their vulnerability and long-term reliance on humanitarian/external assistance.” [Emphasis added] UNHCR (2005:01)

Meredith (2009: 05) argues that

“Refugee self-reliance is not possible within the current framework of UNHCR responses to refugee situations since the length of time spent in asylum countries has risen from an average of nine years to 21 years.” The challenge is how to activate the self reliance of individuals, their households, and or both within their communities.

SUPPORT GROUPS AS A POSSIBLE SOLUTION?

Multidimensional realities of refugees require multi-faceted approaches. Given that most interventions are geared towards individual refugee children, ways of responding to refugees as social beings need to be changed. Refugee support groups may be one means to bridge the gaps that systematic pattern of individualization creates.

From 2009 onwards, aware that the number of refugees requiring psycho-social support far outstripped the organisation’s capacity to deliver to individuals, and also aware that individual counseling could not meet all the psychosocial needs of the different categories of refugees the organization was working with, Refugee Law Project began to pro-actively support existing and new groups of refugees in the hope that such groups could bridge the gaps created by systematic individualization.

The first refugee support group started in 2009 and was called ASSOREF (Association for Francophone Refugees). This brought together French speaking refugees and asylum seekers. Following internal conflicts and misunderstanding between the men and the women, the women decided to form their own section because they believed that the men hindered them from utilizing their potentials. This female section later became ASSOFRA (Association of Female Refugees in

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130UNHCR Geneva (2005), Handbook for Self-reliance, P 1
131Meredith Hunter (2009), The Failure of Self-Reliance in Refugee Settlements. P. 5
132An Outreach Project of the School of Law, Makerere University. (www.refugeelawproject.org)
Africa) because ASSOREF excluded the non French speaking refugees and asylum seekers. ASSOFRA expanded rapidly to include female refugees from Rwanda, Burundi, Southern Sudan, DR Congo, and Somalia. ASSOREF Male continued to operate and brought together males from French speaking countries, but collapsed when some of its founders got resettled. Being the longest standing group at Refugee Law Project, ASSOFRA inspired other refugees to form groups and RLP witnessed the emergence of many other support groups in 2009 onwards.

Refugee Law Project currently works with 12 support groups and 4 communities from country of origin. These groups are both urban and settlement based, namely; Association for Male victims of Sexual Violence (Men of Hope), Association for Female victims of sexual violence (Women of Hope), Association for Persons living with HIV/AIDS, Child Rights Groups (Manchester United & Freedom (8-12yrs and 13-17yrs Respectively), Association for Persons with Disability (PWDs), Association for Elderly Refugees, Peer Counselors’ Association, Union of Survivors of Torture and Sexual Violence (USTSV), Angels Support Group, Association for Refugee Women (ASSOFRA), Association of Community Interpreters in Uganda (UCIA) and Association of Women with Children Born out of Rape. The country of origin communities are, the Burundian Community, Somali Community, Congolese Community and Eritrean Community.

The following section focuses on the Child Rights groups mentioned above,

1. Manchester United Child Right’s Group comprising of refugee children between the ages of 8-12yrs and 2. Freedom Child Rights Group comprising of refugee children between the age of 13-17 years.

Understanding of the reality of the vulnerability of refugee children is a complex issue. Firstly we have unaccompanied minors, children in foster care arrangements, children in detention or detention-like situations, disabled children, children with mental problems, children who are survivors of sexual violence, children in rehabilitation centres for addiction and children who are victims of human, drug and sex trafficking.

THE TRAUMA OF BEING A REFUGEE CHILD

Being a child in a war or crisis situation is a horrible thing. However, refugee children unlike nationals or internally displaced persons have double tragedy.

Firstly, children find themselves with adults as their parents or guardians who have undergone various forms of inhumane treatments and experiences amounting to trauma. Such parents are not only aggressive to the children but end up passing on the trauma to the children resulting into cycle
of generational trauma. Some children have been arrested on various occasions by the police because of involvement in drug deals; yet these children are used by elders. Others have been concerted as beggars and in the process been sexually and physically assaulted, left pregnant or contracted sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS.

For some unaccompanied minors, there is increasing cases of survival challenges which forces such children to ideally ‘survive’ and in the process end up stealing, joining gang groups or survival sex practices. Many have been subject to child labour; the latest global estimates of child labour refer to the year 2004. They indicate that 317 million children 149 million girls and 168 million boys aged 5-17 were employed. More than half of the world’s employed children are considered to be engaged in child labour. However, out of the statistics given, 53 million girls and 73 million boys are engaged in hazardous work.\textsuperscript{133}

Situations are worse for some refugee children who have to take care of fellow children. Child headed household is another common thing especially in urban centres in Uganda.

Some writers claimed that the youth seem to take advantage of displacement situations than the other groups (Turner 1990). However, in the event of restrictions on the right to freedom of movement and repatriation, the youths and children are the most adversely affected population.\textsuperscript{134} However, some of these children do not have any professional counselors or trained staff to handle their problems. Some refugee settlements in Uganda with over 45,000 refugees have only one counselor who is not trained specifically to handle children matters.

Viewing refugee children as traumatized people with multiple problems is only one side of the story; it’s important to affirm the survival and the hope which refugee children have maintained through their lives. While avoiding stereotyping refugees as “victims or heroes,” it must be recognized that many asylum seekers and refugees are determined people who have come through potentially overwhelming life experiences to finally reach a country of asylum or resettlement.

**MANCHESTER UNITED AND FREEDOM CHILD RIGHTS CLUB**

There are currently two children’s support groups which include Manchester children’s club for children aged 8-12 years and Freedom Children’s club for those aged 13-18. These clubs have meetings every first Saturday of the month because many of the children are of school going age. Their activities include debates on relevant issues affecting their lives such as discrimination in the schools, churches and community. Such discussions equip them with social life skills. The groups are

\textsuperscript{133}The World’s Women 2010. Trends and Statistics 
\textsuperscript{134}Zachary 2012. Marginalization. The Plight of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in East Africa.
a platform for the children to know their rights and learn to interact and socialize with other children.

Currently, the group has 65 registered members. The group provides a platform for the youth to share their experiences and challenges. They perform Music Dance and Drama and this provides opportunity to engage in productive leisure activities. They are currently raising funds through their annual subscription fees and an additional registration fee every time they attend their monthly meetings to create a basket fund from which they can borrow for income generating business running. This funds basically raised by the parents as most of the children do not work.

PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN SUPPORT GROUPS

Just like any other association, team or organization, refugee children support groups have internal problems and external challenges. Groups have conflicts that come over resources, goal incompatibility, role ambiguity and contentious influence\textsuperscript{135}. Such conflicts have both positive and negative impacts on individual members and the group at large. Because membership is voluntary, support groups risk disintegration due to such challenges. The following inter alia, are the challenges that refugee support groups may go through.

Unequal opportunities in support groups as executive members may dominate some of the affairs of the group. It is not uncommon to see the president of doing what the secretary, finance and mobilizer should do. Much as roles are clearly mentioned in their constitutions, role ambiguity is a common source of tension. In addition, some executives would want to be the only one to attend meetings, seminars and workshops yet the knowledge got from such events are not transferred to other members. In situations when there is need for more people to participate, executives sometimes end up abusing their position by carefully selecting few people of interest and most especially those in the inner circles.

Creation of cliques within a group impacts negatively on morale, kills team spirit and affects a group’s activities. Such cliques come as a result of unresolved conflicts or feeling that some people are dominating the activities of the group. One symptom is when nationals from one country report that they are the minority and their voices are not heard. Creation of these cliques breeds ineffective communication as information is channeled along those cliques.

Some parents to refugees encourage their children to join groups for different reasons; some believe it’s an avenue for social assistance while others expect expedited resettlement while others believe

\textsuperscript{135} Retrieved from http://www.fao.org/docrep/W7504E/w7504e07.htm
that through their children, they can have direct access officers working on their files for resettlement.

Mutual suspicion is a common feature in support groups. Internal assessment of the groups and comparison is made with members of another group whom the group believes that they are doing better than the others. This is true with the two child rights group as Manchester would want to know what is happening in the Freedom group and would want to do the same immediately.

There is frequently high child-needs related demand like recreation needs, going the beach, opening up their own schools to reduce discrimination they face from Uganda nationals. This is partly because the group looks at host organizations as their alternative family and source of support; this is true especially for unaccompanied refugee minors.

CHALLENGES TO HOST ORGANIZATIONS
Overseeing support groups especially for refugee children comes with both direct and indirect costs. Much as memberships of supports are on voluntary basis, working with support groups calls for resource extension both in terms of time and financial resources to enable the group function. Individual staff ends up pulling their personal resources to support activities of the groups.

Host organization run the risk of co-opting support groups. Many refugee serving agencies in the country have considered forming refugee support groups for effective service delivery and wider access to clients. However, support groups can easily end up indirectly under control by the host organization and sometimes micro-managed or event co-opted. Many seemingly un-noticed errors risk being committed if a group moves from being refugee owned to becoming a property of the host organization.

Limited partners for referrals of refugee children support groups. There is a huge challenge when it comes to referrals of support groups. This is due the fact that most organizations work on individual refugees and more so with adult refugees but not children directly. Therefore, supports are often challenged through parents. Refugee Law Project as an organization therefore finds it an uphill task to find alternative places to refer refugee children support groups.

SUCCESS
Both Manchester United and Freedom child rights club have achieved a lot in the last two years because of working as a group as seen below:
At group level, the groups have succeeded in offering mutual support to members in the group through their coming together during their meetings and recreational activities. The groups’ activities have broadened to include *interalia*, visiting colleagues in hospitals when they are admitted. This has not only offered mutual support but established a situation that is similar to a ‘family-like’ situation in limbo.

SECTION FOUR: DISCUSSION

Despite the above problems and challenges, the refugee children support groups have existed up to date. Many of the members who come with high expectations do not stay for long but those who understand the reason for coming together have endured and are working hard to overcome the problems and work around the challenges by liaising with refugee agencies on challenges they face.

WHY SO ATTRACTIVE?

Membership of support groups is voluntary and open to all refugee children, asylum seekers and deportees. With the constant unrest in the neighbouring countries, Uganda, increasingly receives many asylum seekers and this impacts on numbers in the support groups. The experience before, during and after flight is what drive individuals to belong to specific support group because a great percentage witnessed confrontational forms of degrading torture and abuse. This has vast impacts on the lives of refugees.

Refugees and asylum seekers join support groups for various reasons; some of them see support groups as a gateway to expedited resettlement, easy access to social assistance from service providers, sense of group security and replacement of lost or separated family or community ties. However others come to the groups not expecting gains from service providers but because of shared language, background, nationality, experiences and a sense of belonging.

WHY THESE CHALLENGES ARE NOT UNEXPECTED?

The leaders of refugee children support groups often have very little or no prior experience of group formation, dynamics and sustainability and by the fact that they are children. This is reflected in role ambiguity, a tendency to dominate, and unwillingness to account on finances of the group. When members question their leaders, some of them interpret it as challenging their authority. Much as Refugee Law Project has provided leadership training to the executives of all the support groups, decision making and following procedures still remain a challenge. This children also need a separate session for such trainings.
HOW TO MANAGE

Refugee children are very unique category of vulnerable people. Many scholars have proposed different approaches to minimizing conflicts in groups, Fischer & Ury (1981)\textsuperscript{136}, proposed ‘Principled negotiation’ which they believe can help members to communicate and solve existing problems. They believe in four fundamental principles of negotiation: 1) separate the people from the problem; 2) focus on interests, not positions; 3) invent options for mutual gain; and 4) insist on objective criteria\textsuperscript{137}. Blake, Shepherd and Mouton (1964) proposed a managerial grid model\textsuperscript{138} that group can come with list of what they think other groups describe them and such list are shared by both groups to reduce misperceptions.

Much as there is no single silver bullet as solution to these problems, the problems in refugee support groups originates from traumatic experiences of being a refugee and therefore needs more complex approaches. The following can answer some of the group challenges and help both the group and host organization manage support groups:

There is need for frequent internal assessment on the level of the group. (Forming, Norming, Storming, Performing and Adjourning stages), Groups members need to be aware of their position and clear exit parameters must exist at each level. Frequent meetings and workshops need to be conducted to highlight the need for joint meetings and information sessions. Such meetings can benefit from bringing in third parties trusted by the group; it can be a head of department or Director. In such meetings examples can be drawn from more established groups, and this can help the group find their own solution to the existing problems.

Managing children per say is not an easy thing, not a one person’s effort and no single organisation can manage holistically. Comprehensive approaches are needed to achieve desired results. Therefore, as refugee agencies continue to look for better alternatives for forced migrants throughout the world, there is need to bring on board other government agencies so as to have multiple approaches\textsuperscript{139} in the long run, such collaborating can yield distinctive results for support groups\textsuperscript{140} and other forced migrants at large.

\textsuperscript{136}Fisher, Roger; Ury, William.\textit{Getting to yes: negotiating agreement without giving in}. 1st ed, 1981
\textsuperscript{137}Retrieved from http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/pricneg.htm
\textsuperscript{138}Blake, R.; Mouton, J. (1964).\textit{The Managerial Grid: The Key to Leadership Excellence.}
\textsuperscript{139}Such collaboration also has challenges but at least a better option for forced migrants.
When the challenges and problems in the groups are managed well, support groups can create an avenue in which self esteem, validation, affirmation and appreciation of individual experiences happen. Human dignity is restored and individual potential is given room to thrive. It therefore helps forced migrants deal with the challenges of victim mentality by putting them in positions of responsibility and accountability.

Secondly, support groups can create alternative support systems/networks: defeating stigma & isolation and this helps to replace or substitute lost traditional support mechanisms—including family and community. Like in a family, members can find a degree of acceptance which it may be hard to get in the wider society, particularly if the needs of members are not well understood or they are stigmatized because of their experience or who they are.

Thirdly, support groups can create an avenue for realizing existing capacities and exploring new potentials. Through group trainings and capacity buildings, members of the Group acquire life and technical skills and become more skilled in designing projects, raising project support, and implementation. These skills help both the group and individuals of which the skills later can be carried forward whether still in asylum, resettled, or returned to country of origin unlike the refugee system that put refugees in a place where they’re helpless and dependant on assistance from refugee serving agencies.

Similarly, support groups can create safer social space, and create opportunities to diminish isolation, loneliness and to helps members to understand what happened to them relative to others, i.e. helps get perspective, establish solidarity and common ground. Routine activities like meetings give survivors space to talk and share experiences because they know each other and are able to confide in one another because of shared experiences.

Support groups enable members acquire space to speak for themselves on their own issues. This collective voice serves an important advocacy function to other stakeholders. Collective voices build up the principle of “Nothing for us without us” Having members of the group talk about their experiences has a different impact than if one of their officer speaks.

Support groups can constitute replacement to the lost traditional support mechanisms therefore building a value system based on common human needs as opposed to those formed along tribal, engendered, and national divides. Such groups can help to promote unity in diversity and therefore peace building and conflict resolution, reconciliation and forgiveness among others, all as part of letting go of unhelpful frameworks.
CONCLUSION

Much as support groups offer a wide range of possible solutions to refugee children problems brought by conventional practices of individualisation, it should be noted that support groups are not a replacement or a substitute for individual work with refugees. Not all refugee children want to belong to support groups and not all refugee problems can be solved when they come to groups. Further still, issues that are considered private or confidential cannot be handled in groups but rather through individual therapy and counselling.

There are many internal problems and external challenges facing refugee children and some of these problems are not unexpected because the circumstances surrounding the formation of support group. Managing such problems needs various stakeholders to collaborate and join hands. These problems do not only affect refugee support groups but also host organization. Such challenges might seem to service providers as ‘functional complains’ yet support groups work very hard to solve some of their internal problems and also outsource for external support to mitigate their external challenges. Support groups sacrifice a lot to remain as a group and to solve their internal problems. This commitment explains why, despite the push and pull factors to support groups, these groups have survived to date with increasing number of members. There is need to share such success stories both nationally and internally.
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Dancing with the Devil, or Necessary Dialogue?
Reflections on humanitarian engagement with armed groups that use child soldiers

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ABSTRACT
This paper argues in favour of the necessity of ongoing dialogue with armed non-state groups, even as civil war and violations of international humanitarian law continue. It draws work and research on the intrastate conflicts in Myanmar and Syria with armed groups including the Free Syrian Army, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, and in Myanmar with the Karenni Army, the Karen Liberation Army, and the Mon National Liberation Army. Further, it asserts that a ‘weapons system analysis’ of child soldiers can elucidate the manner in which armed groups see child soldiers, and therefore, how they can be encouraged to follow the prohibition against their use.

Key words: Child soldiers, civil war, humanitarianism
INTRODUCTION

Though children are used as soldiers in conflicts around the world, some armed groups release them from their ranks even when it puts the armed group at a disadvantage in the conflicts they are fighting. State militaries, rebellions and terrorists recruit children when they cannot get other soldiers and come to rely on children who are easily abducted and indoctrinated. Why would armed groups known to violate international humanitarian law (IHL) release the only fighters they can get when they are in the middle of fighting a civil war? Moreover, why are some insurgent groups releasing children and making pledges to follow international humanitarian law before international civil society has attempted to influence them? This is a fundamental puzzle which challenges the literature on insurgency, while also addressing a critical gap in the analysis of child soldiers. Rehabilitation and reintegration dominate the landscape in the analysis, and though naturally are essential areas of work and research, overemphasis on these ignores the mechanisms by children can be removed from armed groups while conflict is ongoing.

In order to understand how and why children can be released from armed groups, it is necessary to understand child soldiers from the perspective of the armed groups that use them. Though at time, this can seem to treat children as a ‘means’ rather than valuable human ‘ends’, it is necessary to engage in this thought process in order to come to understand the cruel but efficient logic of insurgency. My central argument is that ethno-nationalist and politically motivated insurgent groups are increasingly seeking legitimacy at the international level, in the eyes of international organizations and NGOs. They seek to gain this legitimacy by showing that they will follow international humanitarian law especially when the armed groups that they are fighting do not respect those norms. They do this because of increased military interventions from the West, and the manner in which the international system is changing to engage with non-state groups. Using a weapons system analysis, which seeks to understand child soldiers from the perspective of the armed groups that use them, it is possible to understand how this process plays out. Based on preliminary research conducted in conflict zones in Myanmar and Syria, this paper seeks to draw some preliminary conclusions about how organizations can work with armed groups rather than simply criticizing them from a distance.

THE VIEW FROM THE LITERATURE ON CHILD SOLDIERS

A large body of literature has emerged on child soldiers. The literature on reintegration and rehabilitation of children serves a vital role as a mechanism of peacebuilding. However it makes dangerous assumption, that there is a peace to build upon and that the children themselves are no longer in the ranks of the armed groups. There is a critical gap in this scholarship: it neglects the
normative influence of international civil society on armed groups. There are two dominant approaches in the contemporary literature towards child soldiers, the first of which sees development as a means to avert conflict, and thus prevent children from ever being recruited in the first place. This approach subsumes child soldiers into a search for a panacea for conflict as a whole, rather than treating the issue as an area with unique considerations worthy of special attention. The second approach is palliative: it treats the effects of conflict once it has ended by focussing on post-conflict reconciliation (see Wessells, 2006). Though this serves a vital role in reintegration and rehabilitation, the predominance of this approach is problematic, because it misses the distinction between demobilizing children during conflict as opposed to once it has ended. Both approaches fail to see that it is possible for civil society organizations to engage with armed groups even as conflict is ongoing. It is vital that research in this area take place, in order to understand how the use of children in warfare may be stopped even though the war itself may continue.

In order to analyze the role of young combatants in insurgent groups, it is necessary to clarify the definitional parameters within which this my research will operate. For the purposes of this research, therefore, a child soldier will be defined as any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force, in the capacity of active participation in armed conflict as a fighter, including training in the use and handling of weaponry. This stands in stark contrast to the commonly accepted definition of a child soldier, which reads: "any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity [italics added], including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage." The UNICEF guide to the Optional Protocol notes that this definition includes children who have not necessarily carried weapons, and is intentionally broad in order to include as many children affected by conflict as possible (UNICEF, 2003: 14). Whereas the political usefulness of such a definition for the purposes of advocacy are apparent, it is of limited analytical use due to the fact that it includes almost any child involved in conflict in any number of conceptually vague roles.

In order to address the etiology of children who have undergone experiences of soldiering, therefore, my approach will be to embrace specificity over ambiguity. Rather than seeking a theory involving all children in warfare, this research seeks a middle range approach aimed at understanding under what conditions the use of children as soldiers can affect the strategic orientation of rebel groups. The approach here, therefore, is to disaggregate the term 'child soldier' in order to focus on 'young combatants.' As noted by James B. Pugel, the delineation of 18 as the dividing point between childhood and adulthood shows the means by which the term is laden with
Western bias, and ignores the manner in which childhood is a social construct which varies across cultures (2010: 160). Additionally, the term ‘soldier’ does not normally apply to individuals taken as sexual slaves, though they are treated in such a way in the literature on child soldiers. The assertion that comfort women taken by Japanese soldiers in the Second World War were soldiers is unlikely to find much support. Why, then, should it be assumed that girls are soldiers if they were taken as sex slaves by the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone, or as bush-wives by the Lord’s Resistance Army? The purpose here of disaggregating the term ‘child soldier’ is not to rob individuals of their experience, but instead, is intended to assist in understanding the diversity of experience that children have in armed groups.

The approach of my research, therefore, is to avoid universalizing and essentializing all children in conflict under a single umbrella term, and instead, to focus solely on those used as active fighters. The purpose of this is that fighters possess a form of agency and ability unique from porters, sex slaves, or other roles children might be used in. The simple fact that fighters are armed and trained to kill gives them an ability to defect and to challenge or influence authority structures, which impacts the strategic orientation of the movement as a whole in a way that unarmed porters cannot. In addition to this ability to challenge authority, young combatants trained in violence must be conceptualized separately from unarmed individuals in general due to their unique forms of preference-ranking. The dividing principle for my approach, therefore, between young combatants and all ‘child soldiers’ is the task of carrying and holding weapons. Additionally, delimiting the definition to include only fighters also serves this study in that it makes the demobilization of children even more costly to the armed group, as we will only discuss fighters, and not temporary porters and sex slaves who are abducted and discarded with regularity. A fighter is costly, in that they must undergo training, will use expensive resources (weapons and ammunition) and will require a level of trust from commanders that a porter does not.

With a definition of child soldiers in tow, it is worthwhile here to provide a brief analysis of the literature on the industrial organization of insurgency. As I will be focussing on the interactions between humanitarians and non-state actors, it is necessary to clarify what an armed group is. There is a clear difficulty in defining an armed group. As will be discussed below, all armed groups including criminal gangs, terrorist organizations, and insurgents use both a political and economic rationale for achieving their desired ends. Armed groups will be defined as a non-state party engaged in a conflict in which there is: (1) military confrontation between two actors (2) at least one of whom is a non-state actor; and (3) that there is effective resistance by both sides. In contrast to the commonly accepted definition of intrastate civil war by Small and Singer (1972), I will drop the requirements
that the conflict be internal to a single state, that one of the actors involved in the confrontation is a state, and that there be 1,000 battledeaths per year. This allows both for conflicts with intrastate origins which have been internationalized (due to an intervention force, or due simply to spreading over borders), as well as for armed conflict between non-state groups.

A small caveat must be added here, and that is to note that my research will be viewing conflicts as systems rather than as dyadic relationships in the way Small and Singer do. For the purpose of my analysis, my case studies will be the individual armed groups. However it is important to acknowledge that they operate in a conflict system (for example the Kivu Conflict of Eastern DRC) rather than a specific confrontation between two groups (for example, the fight between the M23 and the Congolese state, or between the FDLR and M23). As such, I will view a conflict system as existing as a multiplicity of rebellions rather than seeing conflict as a contestation between two easily distinguishable sides, and will analyze my ARMED GROUP case studies in a single system in relation to one another.

*The View from the Military Perspective*

As nascent conflicts emerge in the developing world, so too do new forms of warfare itself. Increasingly, in both rural guerrilla warfare and urban insurgencies, children are implicated not as bystanders to the belligerents, but as active combatants. The UN Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, Olara Otunnu, estimated that there are currently more than 500,000 child soldiers in state and non-state organizations, active across 85 countries (IRIN, 2009). Contemporary solutions proffered by development organizations long-term solutions, which do not address the immediate logistical reality of conflict. This essay will adopt the argument put forward by Romeo Dallaire, that child soldiers are a unique “weapons system” (as cited in McNutt, 2009). The reality is that those who use child soldiers as a weapons system are unlikely to be swayed by naming-and-shaming processes from abroad or military intervention. This essay will go beyond Dallaire’s views to argue that organizations that seek the universal eradication of military use of children, must be prepared to engage with armed groups in active and ongoing dialogue, even if they are intransigent in terms of their disregard of international humanitarian law. In order to understand how the armed groups themselves see their own use of child soldiers, it is useful to adopt an approach of weapons system analysis, in order to see how child soldiers are a self-replicating weapons technology.

Child soldiering, though certainly not a new phenomenon, now takes place in conflicts across the world. The behaviour of insurgent groups is often pathologized as an emergent form of “new barbarism”, a concept asserting that as wars become increasingly anomie and chaotic (Rosen,
It is also seen as a manifestation of Robert Kaplan’s “coming anarchy”; widespread violence based on scarcity of resources and widespread overpopulation (Kaplan, 1994). Specifically in regards to child soldiers, there is a duality to the viciousness of this ‘new barbarism.’ It emerges both from the child combatants themselves, and from the commanders who lead them. Due to a lack of developed understandings of both mortality and morality, children are willing to engage in acts of great dangerousness and perniciousness more readily than adults (Singer, 2006: 80). The ‘recruitment’ of these children by other child combatants and their malevolent leaders, is in itself an act of barbarism which. Although not new, this contemporary practice is certainly distinct in the scale at which it occurs (Honwana, 2006: 1). It is in this regard that contemporary child militias are a distinct and newly-emergent weapons system, a view of which Romeo Dallaire is a founding thinker. In this sense, child combatants are not viewed as a ‘group of children with guns’; instead it is a ‘weapons system’; a tool or tactic used by those who do not engage directly in combat themselves (Dallaire, 2009). This is a weapons system which is self-replenishing, and almost cost-free in terms of resources. Notwithstanding that this system is low-technology, it is highly sophisticated in its methods and successful in the aims of those who would operate it.

The purpose of this approach is not to strip child soldiers of their humanity; instead the weapons system analysis argues the needs – both military and humanitarian – of disarming child soldiers with great immediacy, in order to bring to an end the internecine conflicts they participate in. A child soldier militia is as a wildfire; it must be eliminated in entirety, as even a few remaining flames will grow to an inferno. The approach of this paper is one which argues that in order to exterminate this fire, and end the use of child soldiers in a given conflict, it is necessary to go beyond simply treating the child soldiers who escape, and must go beyond in order to engage with armed actors to release the children still in their possession.

Economic development will certainly remove the pre-bellum conditions necessary for the low-intensity violence in which child soldiers partake. However, this solution does not deal with the situation with any sense of immediacy. The most common modus operandi of international organizations, development organizations, and NGOs is DDR, often extended as ‘DDRRR’; disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration (OECD, 2007: 250). While integral to the post-bellum peace-building exercise, DDRRR operates on the assumption that both child soldiers and their clientalist patrons actually desire peace. The climates in which child soldiers do exist are ones in which diplomats, aid-workers, and developmental economists usually cannot.
Dallaire once noted that child soldiers are “the most effective weapons system” available to rebel groups (DFAIT, 2009). A caveat must be added to this, however, and that is to observe that the use of child combatants is the most useful effective weapons system in the developing world, against civilian populations and non-professional armies. The term ‘non-professional’ may have offensive connotations which seem to insult the militaries of the non-Western world. The term is, however, a military classification used to assess martial units based on a number of standards. A non-professional army is one which is ill-equipped, underpaid, has poor logistical support, and is made up of soldiers who are not adequately trained (Rosen, 1996: 30). When developing world governments engage child militias in battle, they are not only fighting fire with fire, they are pouring petrol on the flames as they do so.

Military intervention in such a way is unlikely to succeed to end child soldiering, which can be demonstrated through a brief foray into several examples which child soldiers have been used. It is impossible to here analyze each conflict in a narrow and detailed manner. Instead they must be addressed solely in the broad sense, with their most important lessons observed. The first example is of the Revolutionary United Front, which began a brutal insurgency against the government of Sierra Leone. Nigerian forces, although sent to quash the RUF rebellion, caused a continuation of the conflict, as the main member force of ECOMOG peacekeeping mission (Howe, 2004: 166). The Nigerian army was non-professional, and was chronically underpaid, undersupplied and undertrained (Adebajo, 2002: 82). The conflict was finally brought to an end when a 150 British paramilitaries landed in Sierra Leone, repelling an invasion of the capital Freetown and effectively destroyed the RUF while suffering only a single fatal casualty (Fowler, 2004: 159). In neighbouring Liberia, the USA assisted in bringing an end to the neighbouring Liberian Civil War (and the conflict’s use of child soldiers) simply by deploying 150 marines (Copson, 2007: 105). The apartheid-era mercenary organization Executive Outcomes (EO) effectively deployed against child soldiers in both Angola and Sierra Leone. In both examples, military action may have been successful in a tactical sense, though served little in either helping to release child soldiers from the ranks of the rebels or to reintegrate them once conflict had ended.

Further examples can be taken which also stress the need to use of small but effective tactical operations. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) suffers from multiple guerrilla insurgencies, which the government has failed to eradicate in spite of over a decade of effort. Even the UN peace operation in DRC – titled MONUC – has shown a failure to address the country’s thousands of child soldiers (HRW, 2007: 53). Peacekeeping implies that there is a peace to keep; something there usually is not when dealing with child soldiers, hence, peacekeeping fails to
eradicate child soldiers. Uganda has failed to effectively defeat its child rebels, the Lord’s Resistance Army, for over twenty years (Slim, 2008: 222). In Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were finally defeated in 2009, after a rapid heavy military assault. Though successful in its routing of the LTTE, the military assault by the government resulted in massive collateral damage to the civilian population (Hull & Sirlal, 2009). Peacekeepers have failed to halt the military use of children in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sri Lanka and DRC. Developing world governments failed to ‘solve their own problems’ in every example provided. The one exception to this is in Sri Lanka where the civilian population paid a painful price for the government’s successes.

The weapons system analysis breaks new ground in addressing child soldier militias, as it seeks to understand the child soldiers from the perspective of the armed group, in order to turn this logic against itself. Rather than seeking to deploy militaries, or peacekeepers, to fight child soldiers in a context of on-going conflict. It is foolhardy to expect a weak state to eradicate a highly mobile insurgency with an armed force which is corrupt, low-paid, undertrained, or poorly equipped. In addition to this, the civilian population will inevitably have to bear the brunt of the conflict. To deploy peacekeepers to ‘observe and monitor’ the peace is futile in a situation with no peace, where the belligerents to not desire a ceasefire, and child soldier militias continue their predatory attacks against non-combatants. In order to counter ‘the most effective weapons system’, it is necessary to be prepared to engage with the armed groups that use them in means of dialogue, in order to understand why they value the weapons system of child soldiers, and how the use of it can be stopped.

THE VIEW FROM THE ARMED GROUPS’ PERSPECTIVE

In order to understand the behaviour of armed groups, it is necessary to understand how they behave as political actors, rather than pathologizing them as barbarous criminals indifferent to the normative resources necessary for political action in every other theatre. My central argument is that armed non-state groups are seeking legitimacy, and are engaging with the child soldiers norm in order to acquire this. I argue that they adopt an instrumental approach to this legitimacy in order to deploy legitimacy itself as a strategic advantage against their foes, be they the state or other non-state groups.

They seek to gain this legitimacy in order to assert it for future political gains with regards to four key audiences, from whom they gain both material and normative resources. These four audiences are: (1) the international community (including IOs, states and diasporas, and international civil society); (2) populations providing both material and non-material support to the armed group; (3) the population in the armed group’s zone of operations that do not yet support the armed group in
question; and (4) the state itself. I argue that armed groups seek to acquire international legitimacy through engagement with the child soldiers norm, and use this as leverage to acquire legitimacy from the other audiences. In order to explain why armed groups will sacrifice material resources that can contribute to their ongoing struggles, I will select a single norm and trace the processes by which armed groups both adopt the norm, and in the process, attempt to demonstrate to other actors they have internalized it. In this section I will address why the child soldiers norm provides an ideal test for demonstrating legitimacy-seeking and why it is so well poised to address the normative pressure by international actors on Armed groups. Namely, the material trade-off that comes with following the norm makes it a crucial case for any theory seeking to explain the engagement by armed groups with IHL.

I have chosen to focus on the prohibition of child soldiers as the norm I research due to its ability to make contributions on three levels. The first reason for using the child soldiers is the substantive importance of the topic. The use of children and youths in conflict is a problem in intrastate conflicts around the world (Drumbl, 2012). Additionally, as the normative pressure on non-state groups to follow the child soldiers norm is a relatively new phenomenon, it presents an opportunity for innovative research. The second reason is methodological, namely the generalizability of my study both to the universe of cases using child soldiers, as well as beyond to other aspects of IHL. This leads to the third reason, that conclusions generated in this study will be able to enhance the theorization of the relationship between non-state actors and norms in international politics.

Though the child soldiers norm appeared in the mid-1990s (UNICEF, 1996), active dialogue on the subject between Armed groups and international civil society is reaching new levels previously unheard of. Groups such as Geneva Call have begun to work side-by-side with armed groups to assist in the demobilization of child soldiers, while also providing monitoring mechanisms (Geneva Call, 2010). Additionally, though there is a wide range of literature on rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers once they have been demobilized, there is little on how child soldiers are organized and used within an armed group. Further, there is little research on how the use of child soldiers alters the strategic orientation of the organization as a whole, in terms of interests, tactics and strategic aims. The literature on child soldiers within the armed group, and how they come to be demobilized, is limited to biographical accounts (for examples see Beah, 2008; Bilkuiie, 2008; Eichstaedt, 2009; Oloya, 2013). Though they provide emotional and compelling description of the experience of the child combatant, they provide little in understanding why the demobilization process occurs. There is therefore a gap in the literature in which child soldiers have not been analyzed in relation to the politics of insurgency and rebellion.
Recruits themselves are an essential resource for a fighting group. The fighters and leaders are ontologically primary, with all else being ontologically derivative of this relationship in which fighters themselves are *human* resources. The child soldiers norm therefore presents itself as a hard test for analysis to demonstrate that Armed groups care about legitimacy, even when the pursuit of it runs contrary to their material concerns. The sacrifice of these resources suggests less myopic considerations which are more attuned to the *longue durée* of the political struggle of insurgency. Therefore, because of the trade-off between normative commitments and the material needs of insurgency, the child soldiers norm must be addressed by any theory explaining the engagement of Armed groups with IHL.

A body of literature has emerged on reintegration of child soldiers, but there is a second critical gap in this scholarship: it neglects the normative influence of international civil society on armed groups, and the process by which child soldiers can actually be freed. There are two dominant approaches in the contemporary literature on child soldiers, the first of which sees development as a means to avert conflict, and thus prevent children from ever being recruited (Drumbl, 2012). This first approach subsumes child soldiers into a search for the panacea to conflict as a whole, rather than treating child soldiers as an issue with unique considerations worthy of special attention. The second approach is palliative; it treats the effects of conflict once it has ended by focussing on post-conflict reconciliation (see Wessells, 2006). The first of the two dominant approaches, therefore, addresses the issues of child soldiers from a perspective prior to rebellion commencing, while the second addresses child soldiers solely once their direct role in conflict has ended. The current state of the literature misses the distinction between demobilizing children during conflict as opposed to once it has ended. If successful, my research will be generalizable beyond child soldiers, in showing that international civil society can and does engage with belligerents during conflict to encourage respect for international IHL.

**THE VIEW FROM SYRIA AND MYANMAR**

In order to demonstrate the above argument, I will provide a brief analysis and some preliminary conclusions drawn from research working with armed groups. This includes research in 2012 in Myanmar, with groups including the United Wa State Army, Shan State Army-South, the All Burma Students Democratic Front, the Karen Liberation Army, the Karenni Army and the Kachin Independence Army. In Syria, I conducted interviews with the Free Syrian Army, the al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (al Qaeda). These examples are not intended to definitely prove the argument noted above, but instead to demonstrate Eckstein’s notion of a plausibility probe. Namely, this represents a selection of cases done in order to strengthen the prospects of the
theory rather than confirm or reject it. Establishing the plausibility therefore goes beyond raising confidence in the central hypothesis, and helps to refine a theory to be tested (Eckstein, 1992: 147-152).

I conducted research on the subject in Syria in July of 2013, in the city of Aleppo, during the Syrian Civil War’s bloodiest month since the conflict began in 2011. The Syrian Civil War began in 2011, when protesters against the Bashar al-Assad regime took up active arms against the government. Prior to this, peaceful protests associated with the Arab Spring were dealt with harshly by the government, leading the opposition to active rebellion. Since the conflict began, more than 100,000 people have been killed (BBC, 2013). This is a particularly brutal conflict that has seen widespread use of terrorist strategies, as well as cluster munitions, thermobaric weapons, and even limited use of chemical weapons in a conflict in which there is little regard for international humanitarian law or the protection of civilians (Lynch, 2013).

Syria thus presents itself as a hard case for demonstrating that belligerents are interested in international legitimacy and attention from the international community. As discussed earlier, this paper will continue to adopt a weapons system approach of viewing the child soldiers, in order that the use of these children can be better understood from the perspective of those who use and abuse them. Though research on the ground took place with all three of the main Syrian opposition groups – the Free Syrian Army, the al-Nusra front and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham – this section will focus on the latter.

In Syria, knowledge of the subject of child soldiers is commonplace, and armed groups were surprisingly receptive to discussing the subject. Firstly, it is useful to go over a brief discussion of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (hereafter, ISI), the local affiliated organization of al-Qaeda. The group was created in 2006, during the American occupation of Iraq. It was created as an offshoot of al-Qaeda by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and ran a campaign largely targeted against Iraqi civilians, in order to encourage a Shia/Sunni civil war within Iraq. The group is a Salafist Islamic organization, with little regard for either international humanitarian law or the international community in general. Since the Syrian Civil War began, the group has been involved in the conflict since the beginning, and has been engaged both in active fighting against the regime forces as well as a campaign of terrorist activity against civilian areas in regime-held territory.

The ISI is a group of unknown size, though has approximately 2,500 fighters spread between Syria and Iraq. Though hardly a likely candidate for the programs that Geneva Call runs, they represent an interesting case study for the purposes of this research on the subject of child soldiers. In
discussions on the topic, one commander of ISI expressed shock that anyone could even think that an Islamist would use children as soldiers, noting “In the heart of Islam, you can’t make children a soldier.”\textsuperscript{141} Fighters assured me that it was impossible for anyone to join the ISI prior to the age of 20.\textsuperscript{142} At the same time, however, they admitted to a widespread use of children in supporting roles, as porters, cooks and the rear guard. Children are widely used in bases, but according to one fighter, fathers can bring their sons with them even when they are fighting on the front line.\textsuperscript{143} Such condemnations of the use of children as fighters, while acknowledging that they were used in supporting roles, is common amongst ISI fighters.

It could be argued that the ISI fighters are merely engaging in cheap talk, and have little or no interest in actually following the prohibition against the use of child soldiers. However, a local Islamist initiative to protect children provides an interesting example to challenge this. The ISI had started a local NGO to protect orphaned children in Aleppo, working with over 500 families to take care of orphaned children.\textsuperscript{144} The NGO raised funds abroad, while also expressing a strong desire to work with international organizations that . Objections may arise noting that the actions of the ISI fighters in working with local NGOs may simply be a reflection of a desire for more positive media relations. This may well be the case, but the fact that they are willing to engage with international actors on the subject of child soldiers is telling in of itself. It is worth further noting that this group is the on-ground affiliated organization of al-Qaeda, and armed group that is pathologized and criticized internationally more than any other. It is telling that fighters and commanders would express a desire to work with international actors on the subject of child soldiers, while engaged in perhaps the most brutal conflict at the time.

A brief discussion of Geneva Call’s work in Myanmar, can help elucidate how the approach of dialogue with armed groups can have a snowball effect, growing both in size within a single issue – such as the use of child soldiers – while also spreading into other areas , such as the use of landmines.

Geneva Call has been active in seeking to encourage armed non-state groups to sign up to deeds of commitment, which state the group will follow the prohibition on the use of child soldiers as well as engage in certification mechanisms to ensure that they are following the agreement. As of August 2013, three armed groups have signed deeds of commitment on child soldiers; namely, the Mon National Liberation Army, the Karen National Liberation Army, and the Karenni Army.

\textsuperscript{141} Name withheld, interview with author, July 2013 – Aleppo, Syria
\textsuperscript{142} Name withheld, interview with author, July 2013 – Aleppo, Syria
\textsuperscript{143} Name withheld, interview with author, July 2013 – Aleppo, Syria
\textsuperscript{144} Name withheld, interview with author, July 2013 – Aleppo, Syria
What is worthy of note in the Burmese context is the fact that once one group signs up to the Deed of Commitment, more follow. This represents a “norm cascade” of the kind described by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998). What is fundamentally interesting in the Burmese context is that more and more armed groups are signing up to the norm against the use of child soldiers, while the state does not respect the prohibition against the use of child soldiers. The Burmese case demonstrates quite clearly that a single issue – such as child soldiers – can further be used to increase respect for international humanitarian law in terms of depth within that issue, but also in terms of breadth across substantive issue areas. Geneva Call has increased its area of work from landmines into child soldiers, and even gender-based violence (Geneva Call, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Even when conflict is ravaging the landscape and destroying lives, it is fundamentally important that humanitarian actors continue to engage with belligerents in peaceful dialogue, in an attempt to push them towards peaceful respect of international humanitarian law. Indeed, as the example of Myanmar shows, dialogue and engagement with non-state actors can actually serve as a springboard to increase the intensity of relationships between armed groups and humanitarians, while also allowing expansion into new issue areas. In order to understand how this is possible, however, it is essential that we are able to understand the use of child soldiers from the perspective of the armed groups that use them. The weapons system approach allows us to do that. Though it may risk dehumanizing the children we are most interested in saving, if we are not able to move past behaviour in which we simply ‘name-and-shame’ armed groups while criticizing them from afar, it will be impossible to engage with them peacefully and encourage them to follow international humanitarian law as it relates to the protection of children in conflict.
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Beyond Child Soldiering: Understanding Children and Violence in Colombia through Creative Research Methods

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Why is it difficult to have peace in Colombia?

Because they want to solve everything with weapons, they don’t respect the opinions of others, there is no equality.

16 year-old boy, Colombia

ABSTRACT

Children, defined here as being under the age of eighteen, residing in areas of armed conflict or other prolonged situations of violence often become perpetrators of violence (Boyden and de Berry, 2004; Kuper, 2005; Rosen, 2005). Commonly referred to as ‘child soldiers’, these children are presented primarily in media, academia and policy as passive and vulnerable victims of forced conscription. However, emerging studies present evidence that many children participate in conflict of their own volition, utilizing creativity and resilience in agency to improve their circumstances (Rosen, 2005; Honwana, 2006, Hart, 2006; Rosen, 2007; Poretti, 2008). This research focuses on the mobile trajectories of children’s lives under conditions of political violence and economic uncertainty in Colombia, and will examine how children maintain normalcy in the face of daily violent conflict. Employing arts-based methods of data collection, this paper examines the dynamics of the use of children in the armed conflict in Colombia, demonstrating the variable of agency in differentiating among child soldiering, child displacement and child trafficking.

Key words: Armed conflict, violence, childhood, child soldiers, Colombia, forced displacement.
INTRODUCTION
To date, children’s perspectives on the impact of extreme violence on their own agency remains relatively unexplored. The existing literature on children and war focuses primarily on trauma and pathology, leaving out the greater societal dimensions of violence (Hart, 2006; Boyden & de Berry, 2004; Hilker & Fraser, 2009).

Furthermore, contemporary research concerning the use of children in armed conflict is overwhelmingly limited to child soldiers, which gives rise to a conflation of child soldiering with other related issues, such as child displacement and child trafficking. This lack of a nuanced understanding of the various uses of children in armed conflict impedes efforts to adequately address the affected children’s needs. Employing arts-based research methodologies, this project focuses on the ways in which children negotiate their daily responsibilities and strategies for survival in order to establish a more robust understanding of the children’s own motivations in conflict participation. By engaging these issues through the lens of artistic methods, this paper seeks to break from a general tendency in public policy and implemented programs to interpret the lives of children in armed conflict via the languages and scripts used to understand adults. As explained by Patricia Holland (2004, 20), children’s voices have been muted and controlled by adults, as objects of imagery, very rarely its makers. In the following pages, I argue for the importance of expanding the current outlook on children’s experiences in the Colombian conflict beyond child soldiering to include informants, reporting, resource acquisition, forced migration/displacement, voluntary conscription, and a myriad other occupations in order to successfully design and implement policies and practices for child protection and peace building efforts. I acknowledge the efficiency of creative methods in understanding children’s perspectives of their own realities, and assert that the benefits are two-fold: they will improve children’s perceptions of their daily lives through self-actualization, while simultaneously eliciting data sets that engage narratives of the child’s lived experiences (Morrow, 2001; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
This research employs a theoretical framework based initially on the sociology of childhood developed by James and Prout (1997); on the relationship between violence and social capital by McIlwaine and Moser (2004) and Rodriguez (2011); and on agency and resilience raised by Boyden and Mann (2005). The conceptual rationale for such a framework starts by recognizing the relationship between violence, social capital, child conscription, agency and resilience in order to develop an integral approach to the complex scenarios of the armed conflict that have impacted young people for decades in Colombia. In contextualizing their study of children’s lives within local
ideas about their roles, abilities, rights and responsibilities, researchers argue that considering the ways in which childhood is conceptualized and experienced within different societies and cultures is vital (James and Prout, 1990; Mayall, 2002; Boyden, 2003; Korbin, 2003). James and Prout (1997, 8) thoroughly develop the concept of the social construction of childhood, asserting: Childhood is understood as a social construction. As such it provides an interpretive frame for contextualizing the early years of human life. Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies.

As Jason Hart (2006) also notes, even in a distinct location, there is no one single definition of childhood. Tobias Hecht (2008) further explains that in Brazil, the understanding of childhood differs according to social and economic status and distinguishes between nurtured and nurturing childhoods. He states that in urban Northeastern Brazil, rich childhood is a nurtured status and poor childhood is a time for nurturing the household. Whereas nurtured children are loved by virtue of being children, the loved received by nurturing children is to a great extent a function of what they do and how they earn love, as they struggle to win the affection of their mothers. As the author notes, the nurtured childhood of the rich in Brazil has much in common with the ideal of contemporary middle-class childhood in Europe and North America. In Colombia as in Brazil, there is a large disparity between social classes (World Bank, 2012). As well, many cultural and ethnic backgrounds – societies that are matriarchal and those that are patriarchal – coexist (Aptekar, 1988). Both states employ the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child designation of childhood as beginning at birth and ending at age 18 (UN General Assembly, 1989), which is incongruent to local constructions of childhood, and is also exclusive of their notions and contributions of what childhood is and should be. Therefore, taking into account the specific context in which studies with children are conducted allow the researcher to produce an integral and inclusive understanding of childhoods indigenous to a particular location.

In their assessment of the perpetuated violence in Latin America, Caroline Moser and Cathy McIlwaine (2004) examine the consequences and impact of conflict and violence beyond economic costs by evaluating the manner in which it destroys or reconstructs physical, human, natural, and social capital. Most importantly, they show that different violence types are interrelated along a scale with significant reinforcing linkages between them; how political violence over territory related to drug production leads to social conflict between community members, which in turn intensify domestic violence. Moser (2005) further states that domestic violence including physical, sexual and verbal violence between a couple and against children results in family members, especially young
men, to depart from home, take drugs and join gangs, eventually leading to other types of economic violence, and the destruction of trust and solidarity in societies.

As Colombian scholar Clemencia Rodriguez (2011) further affirms, war’s impact on societies is not limited to direct attacks; it also slowly destroys the social, democratic, and cultural fabric of communities when its members are obliged to live alongside armed forces for a prolonged period of time. The author makes the link between social fabric and child recruitment by stating that insurgent groups recruit the children of these communities weakened by social mistrust, terror, individualism, and insecurity. She furthers states that the extended presence of armed groups and their custom of drafting civilians as informants and supporters either by force or voluntarily destroys existing ties of unity, solidarity, and trust in communities, and replaces it with isolation and terror. Consequentially, this situation produces sentiments of powerlessness and victimization. Rodriguez explains that as conflict and disunion among community members increase, the use of violence and force become normalized, leading to extreme and totalitarian beliefs. She finally creates the link between agency, child recruitment and social capital by confirming that reconstituting traditional solidarities, communication and collective participation strengthens the agency of the community as it responds to armed violence and helps keep young people away from armed groups. Thus, as violence is multi-dimensional and has penetrated the layers of Colombian societies and weakened as well as transformed the social fabric of communities, children navigate between the various resulting phenomenon of war including child recruitment, forced displacement and child trafficking. Moreover, the correlation between social capital and child recruitment depicts the identities the child builds with his or her environment defining and redefining childhood in different contexts.

While adults have a moral responsibility toward minors that entails protection from adversity as is stated in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, Boyden (2005) argues that a discourse of children as powerless and reliant on adults during difficult circumstances does not encourage children’s coping and resilience, nor does it portray their realities. The author further states that research in various regions of the world has indicated that children are social agents in their own rights, even in the most distressful of situations. She especially stresses that disregarding children’s perceptions can lead to inadequate interventions far from children’s actual needs and welfares, and can actually cause harm (ibid). Although she values the importance of recognizing children’s resilience, Boyden also brings to light the challenges associated with the concept of resilience (ibid). Colombian scholarship has recently begun to question the discourse of resilience, acknowledging that it may have been confused with the normalization of war and a resulting tendency to resolve
issues through the use of violence (Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, 2006). Jo Boyden and Gillian Mann (2005) explain that as perpetual war destroys the social fabric of societies, it generates a chronic state of poverty gradually rooted in families and communities in vicious cycles. As Colombia’s conflict emerged out of social injustice, there is a direct correlation between poverty and violence; and as poverty becomes chronic, so does violence. Thus, a child born into this type of adversity would more easily navigate between the various resulting dynamics of the conflict than would an adult.

OBJECTIVES
Many questions arise from the nexus of agency, resilience and social capital within a context of the social construction of childhood in armed conflict, particularly in the discourse of resilience in the Colombian context. For instance, if resilience refers to positive adaptation in the face of adversity, when a child becomes a soldier in order to secure social, political, or economic capital, can that act be characterized as resilience? Questions such as this led me to my research question, which is as follows: In light of the gaps in contemporary understanding of the spectrum of roles that children play in conflict, how might a more nuanced study of the ways in which war-affected children negotiate childhood within Colombia’s armed conflict provide insight into means for bridging these gaps? This research aims to understand children’s experiences and perspectives of the Colombian conflict and break from the tendency of limiting them to child soldiering. Hence, it seeks to provide a link between the various dynamics of children’s participation in the war in Colombia in order to challenge the current findings available.

CONTEXT OF RESEARCH
Colombia is in the throes of the longest internal conflict in the Western Hemisphere since the 1940s (Martin-Ortega, 2008). Warfare persists between left-wing groups, paramilitary forces, emerging criminal gangs, and the national army resulting in a devastating loss of life. Moreover, Colombia is the largest global producer of cocaine, providing nearly 80 percent of the world’s demand (Saab & Taylor, 2009). Profits from this illegal industry have alimented the conflict in both the government and warlord coffers (ibid). All groups obtain a large portion of their income from the narcotics trade, the preservation and production of coca plantations, kidnapping, extortion, and use of children in this highly profitable activity (ibid). Colombian children are directly exposed to the detrimental consequences of conflict, including but not limited to landmines, forced or obligated recruitment, displacement, and sexual violence. With limited to no access to healthcare and education, their development and opportunities are greatly compromised. Colombia has some of the worst humanitarian indicators in the world: it has been ranked first in the world in forced displacement
(Martinéz, 2011), and third in child soldiering (Save the Children UK, 2008) and crime enjoys a high level of impunity (Amnesty International, 2012). The combination of these indicators amounts to an ignored humanitarian crisis.

The children of this conflict are vastly underserved by national and international interventions, and increasingly so as the conflict continues. The nearly total impunity under which a series of corrupt Colombian governments operate, according to the Colombian National Trade Union School (ENS) and the Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ), cripples any provisions of justice for the nation’s millions of conflict victims. In the past 8 years, levels of violence against children have significantly amplified (Watchlist, 2012). This escalation results primarily from the increase in national army operations throughout the country, the militarization of children and youth through training schools and a constant barrage of propaganda, and the rise of illegal armed groups known as Bacrims or bandas criminales emergentes (emerging criminal gangs). Bacrims were born from former paramilitary members after a false demobilization process in 2003 under the previous national government (ibid). These insurgent groups are not recognized to be within the margin of the armed conflict by the Colombian government, but are rather considered common criminal groups. This categorization allows for the further marginalization of thousands of victims suffering from their abuses by removing their bacrim pursuits from the context of the extended conflict. Many insurgent forces including bacrims use children as sicarios or hitmen for many purposes of the operation of the group. Children are initiated by being granted with simpler tasks such as delivering messages, storing or transporting drugs and arms, to more complex duties such as killing, disappearing bodies, kidnapping, and terrorizing a region for increased control of the territory. Although children sicarios are being used in armed conflict operations, and should therefore be included in the category of child soldiers, they are rather excluded from national and international programs and policies that address child soldiering. Child sicarios members represent an important childhood space in Colombia, as they are ostracized by society, effectively forcing children to choose between securing economic capital by collaborating with a militia or social capital by working to avoid association with all armed groups.

Two major assumptions that have discouraged a more rigorous engagement with children in conflict as reporters and informants are that 1) children are helpless victims; and 2) the expertise of the researcher at interpreting the children’s motives for participation in the conflict (Hart & Tyrer, 2006). Recent literature on child soldiers challenges the dominant humanitarian concept that child soldiers are simply vulnerable individuals used by adults as malleable and dispensable weapons of war (Rosen, 2005). Understanding children as agents in the wide range of circumstances in which they
are engaged in conflict challenges the traditional approach, in that it examines how children themselves create and sustain new identities and learning opportunities. The specifics of history and culture shape the lives of children and youth during peace and war, creating many different kinds of childhood and many different kinds of child soldiers (ibid). As Rosen (ibid) further notes, although very young people have served in armed forces and armed groups for centuries, the increase in attention to the problem derives from the popular belief that the conscription of children is a uniquely modern form of child abuse and exploitation. Not only is this popular belief unsubstantiated, it also fails to acknowledge the spectrum of children’s roles in contemporary armed conflict. Hart (2006) further strengthens this statement noting that the present commotion to increase awareness and halt conscription has mostly developed devoid of evidence-based scholarly research on children’s participation in militia.

Systems for monitoring violations and protecting and assisting children in Colombia are still in the early stages and operate from a rather weak structure (Watchlist, 2012). Given the numerous threats, forced disappearances, and massacres experienced by the Colombian population, there is a tremendous fear of reporting. Therefore, unless the reporting system is accompanied by not only security measures for the victims but also an efficient response following the reporting, violations will remain invisible and victims excluded from the process.

METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a combination of various qualitative methods to examine children’s responses to violence in Colombia. Responses were collected from both verbal and artistic expressions using various media, but predominantly photography and videography. Thus, ‘the emphasis was to generate knowledge from the perspective not only of the researchers but also of the researched’ (Morrow, 2001, 256). The use of a multi-method approach provides a wide diversity of roles and methods of research participation for children. It is an efficient means for enabling young people to choose and control what they want to represent (Morrow, 2001, 257). This is particularly significant with children who may have never been consulted on their opinions, their likes and dislikes. The change from research on children to research with children and placing them as participants rather than ‘objects’ of the research allows for a new interest in children as active social agents (Marr & Malone, 2007, 23). As well, the use of a diversity of media provides skill and capacity-building, thereby promoting confidence and a means for self-actualization. Rena M. Palloff (1996, 47) furthers states that such an approach to research not only seeks to produce knowledge but also uses that knowledge to empower children as they find solutions to the difficulties they face, and boosts their
sense of self-esteem through ownership of the process and the solution.

The data analysis was done at different levels during and after the data collection. The data collection and initial analysis were run on a rolling basis.

Children participated in the formulation of the topics and then (1) looked at the pictures and footage in groups and selected particular ones that ‘told the story’ of issues brought up in the group activities; and (2) presented their work to each other. Children were encouraged to explain their own productions either in groups or private. The final analysis the data was thematically coded ensuring triangulation. As complete objectivity is impossible in gathering and analysing data, all reporting included critical reflection on limitations and possible alternatives, and bias in analysis was reduced by consulting reports of advocacy organizations, and communities.

Locations
I conducted research in several regions of Colombia since 2005, but primarily in the two following communities:

1. In the community of La Pradera, in the district of Aguablanca, city of Cali, department of El Valle del Cauca in the South-western region of the country. Cali is one of the three major cities in Colombia and home to the largest Afro-Colombian population. It is the capital of the Pacific Colombian coast and serves as one of the main trade hubs of the country. The district of Aguablanca is one of the most violent areas of the city (Urrea, F. & Quintín, P., 2000). Active in Aguablanca are both left and right-winged insurgent groups, gangs, and oficinas (offices), all of which employ children as hitmen (ibid). Aguablanca also has one of the largest Afro-Colombian community, as well as some of the lowest economic levels and a concentration of internally displaced people (Barbary, Ramírez, and Urrea, 1999) I led the workshop in Casa 6 of the Casas Francisco Esperanza, a program of the Fundación Paz y Bien (www.fundacionpazybien.org). There are various Casas Francisco Esperanza (Francisco Esperanza Houses) located throughout the city and are part of a nongovernmental organization that leads a community network to provide assistance to individuals displaced by violence via community dining centers, microcredit programs, assistance to pregnant youth, and conflict resolution.

2. In Comuna 13, in the city of Medellin, department of Antioquia with the collaboration of Fundación Pazamanos (www.fundacionpazamanos.jimdo.com), which works to empower youth in marginalized sectors. The second largest city in Colombia after the capital, Medellin was once considered the most dangerous city in the world and is home to the largest drug cartels, according
to Colombia Reports (2009). After a period of relative calm, the violence in the city intensified with the proliferation of new gangs following the failed demobilization of the paramilitaries in 2008. Children are often caught in the crossfire between armed groups and the police. Residents are confined to set areas marked by invisible frontiers that constantly shift with control over territory. Children are in constant danger of being stigmatized and/or targeted by outsiders as being members of a particular armed group. In 2002, the government launched the largest military operation in the conflict’s history, called Operación Orion, in Comuna 13 to fight insurgent groups present in the neighborhood. This operation employed no discrimination and hundreds of innocent young people were mistakenly killed (Verdad Abierta, 2012). Even more young people were falsely labeled guerrillas; this label came to be known as ‘false positives’ (Godfrey-Wood, 2009). Comuna 13 is still one of the most dangerous communities in the city, is the home to one of the most inadequate educational systems in the country, and must serve a large and ever-increasing internally displaced population (Sánchez and Atehortúa, 2008).

Preparation for each workshop included general orientation and immersion, setting up the research workshop space, identifying possible research participants and workshop assistants, and training the assistants. The research was based in community centers from which the participants were recruited. The research objectives and activities were presented to the participants with the support of a community leader and/or a social worker. Both the children and their families were fully informed of the course and all participants enrolled voluntarily.

For data collection I held a workshop in each location for a period of four weeks each on a daily basis. Workshops and group activities were designed for 12 to 20 participants (accounting for possible dropouts) between the ages of nine to eighteen years old.

The workshops encompassed three aspects of the children’s lived experiences: My Life, My Family, and My Neighborhood. Each three-hour workshop consisted of: Group discussions: Perceptions of their neighborhood, their sense of belonging and identity, safety, and favorite activities and spaces in casual group talks.

Children were also handed various magazines and newspapers to clip images and phrases meaningful to them, and to portray their views through a collage and a verbal presentation of the collage.
Self-portrait: This method encourages children to reflect on their lives and identities. Paper and colored pencils were distributed, and children were asked to indicate on paper what they are currently experiencing in their lives, and to include important people and events. Freely written accounts or drawings of “My Life”

Spatial Maps: Children were asked to draw a representation of themselves, then place people in their lives most important to them either linearly or around them with the closest one to them as the most meaningful individuals.

Timeline: Each child was asked to draw where they were presently on a line, their past, and their future projections and expectations of their lives, and the most important events and changes related to their biographies.

Drawn maps of ‘My Neighborhood’ Each participant was asked to draw a spatial map of their neighborhood with the most significant geographical locations and what a neighborhood represents to them.

Photography and Filming: Children learned about the basics of photography and videography, including how to create pinhole cameras and to take their selfportraits. Photos taken were revealed in a dark room we built together. The task was repeated until the portrait was to the participants’ satisfaction. Part of this assignment included learning to compose a script based on their autobiography, which would later be used to take still photos and video.

In addition to these activities and depending on the context and the choice of each individual, other means were also used such as voice recordings in lieu of writing, orally sharing their perspectives, or simply showing me their work without allowing me to keep it.

In each location, there were assistants or community leaders who usually work with youth and who assisted me in identifying the child participants and informing the community of my presence and research. After each session, we debriefed and shared our observations. The month-long workshop included various days of still shooting freely where children took the cameras home, and the film was later developed. Some of the youth were selected to operate the camcorders based on the recommendations of the assistants. Participants were recruited through an opt-in policy and informed consent was ensured through on-going discussions during the period of the workshop.
From the start, I made it clear that any participant is free to withdraw at any time. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants were respected to secure their identities and safety and that of their families by asking for permission for the use of visual data, changing the names and locations, and confidential information was not released outside of the research process. During the preparation time, I obtained advice and permission from knowledgeable locals or experts in the culture of the community in which the research was conducted as to the suitability of particular methods and the most appropriate way to raise specific issues.

**FINDINGS**

The marginalized status of children in Colombian society and the many challenges they face make them especially vulnerable to use and abuses by both illegal and state forces. Lack of employment and educational opportunities, subjected to stigmatization and maltreatment, living with daily violence and aggression, and the frequency of illegal activities drive children to actively participate in the conflict via gangs, drug traffickers, left and right-winged forces, the police, the army, and other entities connected to the conflict. Increasing numbers of children have become victims of murder and physical abuse through their association with the internal conflict. All children, particularly those from vulnerable populations, are highly exposed to recruitment by armed groups with almost 90% of child recruitment happening in rural areas (Villar-Márquez & Harper, 2010).

Furthermore, a large majority of children have been exposed to violence in their families and communities or through the media, especially witnessing combat, landmine explosions, bombings, and kidnapping. All forms of violence greatly affect children, and the recent decentralization of the Colombian conflict to localized drug trafficking-related combat with newly formed insurgent groups engages children at an unprecedented rate. Many children and adolescents do not attend school or are obligated to abandon their studies for reasons related to the conflict, including landmines on their paths to school, recruitment in schools and on their way to school, killing of teachers, forced displacement, and cuts in the education budgets to be invested in military operations.

The discussion derived in this section is based directly on the ones carried out by workshop participants via their own observations and perspectives. Furthermore, all photos and illustrations were produced by the participants.

As Jason Harts (2006) states, adopting a fully participatory approach to research with children as collaborators demands flexibility in time, process and outcomes on the part of the researcher. I had
prepared the activities with the children after careful consideration and research in pedagogical approaches in various countries using visual methods and did not expect to have to improvise and alter the program as much as I actually did. For instance, group discussion were not very successful given the issue of trust that exists between different youth belong to different gangs. Hart confirms that in contexts of war, revealing information through open discussions may put children, their families and the community in danger. There were certain topics that the participants did not mind speaking in groups and actually would actively engage in discussion, such as those outside of the community, e.g. the corruption of the Colombian politicians, their despise of the national police and the mistreatment they have to endure when encountering them, racial discrimination, poverty, social classes, their aspirations for the future, etc. Themes related to the activities that were carried out during the workshops such as singing, dancing, capoeira, taking photographs, filming, printing in the dark room, crafting, and any other artistic events were also freely shared among each other without any reservation.

One major obstruction presented itself that I had not taken much into account. The district of Aguablanca is considered one of the poorest and most dangerous zones of the city of Cali, and La Pradera was its most fearful and marginalized neighborhoods. Most of the children of this community had never left La Pradera, and less Aguablanca due to economic and frontier restrictions imposed by different gangs. Their exposure to alternate living conditions was limited to television when available; the selection of programs and films are not of the highest caliber and less educational. Finally, they were not often or ever asked to provide their opinion on a particular matter that affected them on a daily basis, and less to express themselves through less conventional methods they would be accustomed to such as collages, drawing, painting, film, and photography.

The issue of remaining silent and learning not to voice out opinions that could put one’s life at risk is also extremely important to take into account. This in no way states in an absolute manner that all of participants reacted in the same way; some were more expressive than others by nature and quickly developed or manifested skills that proved helpful and engaging during the workshop.

Needless to say, children's personality traits, gender and position and belonging to a particular gang created power relations that need to also be taken into account. Group leaders who happened to be more rebellious than the rest of participants had a tendency to take the lead in discussions and it was quite difficult at the beginning to ask them to let others speak without offending them.
Age in this case was not a main factor, extroversion counted more. Moreover, I did not want to lose their interest in the program either, I therefore decided to put those leaders in charge of managing the group rather than doing it myself.

Having the responsibility to lead a group and put some order into the activities boosted their self-confidence and proved to be successful: the ones in charge were content and maintained their interest while the rest of the participants felt more comfortable having someone from the community conducting the events. One may argue that this decision might have increased the power relations between the participants, however, it was the only way to keep these leaders in the program and power relations between them and other children already exist in the same intensity and even more on a daily basis. To balance the attention given to the participants, I made sure all children were encouraged and cheered equally, and paid close attention to the most sensitive ones who would often shy away. In discussing power relations, it is important to point out that there were fewer girls than boys, with a ratio of at least 4:1 in both communities where I led the workshops. Girls had a tendency of speaking out less than boys, keeping mostly to themselves; however, they were more expressive in the arts that they produced.

The educational level of the children was also a factor in their participation in the activities. Some of the participants had not completed many levels academically and had difficulty or no ability to read or write. This issue became manifest when children were taught how to write and compose a manuscript before learning to use a film camera, as well as any writing assignment. I gave them the option of speaking into a recorder what they wanted to say as soon I noticed the handicap, which made them feel much more at ease and resulted successful.

There were instances that one of the children decided to erase all of the footage they had filmed and when asked why, they told me in their own words that it was ‘ugly’ and they would rather learn about something positive and happy. Although it may have been valuable data, I had to respect it and not ask any further questions. One of the most engaged youth clearly stated on various occasions that he wanted to learn about film and photography, and did not want to talk about what he could not change.

As shown in Figure 7 (Appendix A), there is a great mistrust in the national government, the national army and police; and children perceive the state as the perpetrator and the cause of the conflict in Colombia. On the illustration, war is written on the left top corner with a drawing and label of a
politician below. Two arrows branch off from the politician into the statement: ‘Politicians help narcotrafficking’ with a relatively large drawing of a money bill with the word ‘money’ below it. The child then introduces ‘My neighborhood’ below branching off into ‘problems’ on one side and ‘drug’ on the other side illustrated by a drawing of different drug products and a user. Finally, at the bottom of the artwork, the child draws a killing scene with diverse weapons labeled as ‘arms’. The drawing clearly illustrates that the child makes the link between the state and narcotrafficking, which in turn aliments the conflict and violence in their neighborhoods, as also explained by him in a private discussion. As many of the young people in Medellin endure the detrimental and fatal consequences of Operation Orion implemented by the government for more than a decade now, they perceive the state as the enemy and the cause of their poverty and marginalization. Children are often beaten and mistreated by the state forces as they are often misidentified as belonging to a particular insurgent group as it is also the case of Aguablanca in Cali. Many have disappeared as was reported in the scandal of the False Positives in 2008, in which innocent young people were killed and passed off as guerrillas by the national army to receive compensation and recognition by the government. As a 16 year-old male workshop participant in Cali stated: ‘The government orders the officials to be tough with us, youth, even though it is in fact the beginning of all of our suffering.’ In one of the videos produced by a 16 year-old boy in Aguablanca and titled ‘Stories Behind the Promise’, many young people express the stigmatization and marginalization they endure for belonging to the neighborhood of Aguablanca.

Another phenomenon that proliferates in large cities in Colombia are children hitmen who are hired by offices, and in both of my case studies, many of the children worked or were still connected in some way to one of these criminal institutions. Further details about their association have been omitted for security reasons. Many of these offices are directly connected to paramilitary groups, bacrims or other organized criminal networks, and use children in vulnerable situations. As a workshop participant illustrated it in Figure 4, children are often hired by oficinas to perform the functions of the armed group. Although these children comply with the definition of a child soldier as per the Cape Town Principles of 1995, they are simply further marginalized, considered as delinquents and excluded from public policies, and international and national interventions. Figure 8 below further shows the relationship at the bottom of the hierarchy of the child as tostado or crucified to the top where it starts with the war in Colombia and links it to the rest of the world. Extortions, kidnappings, drug and arms trafficking, corruption and most importantly social daily injustices are clearly inter-connected and explained by the child.
War undoubtedly generates more poverty for the large majority of civilians and depletes the country of its national resources, Jason Hart (2002) notes; however, it cannot be assumed that it creates child labor. On the other hand, he remarks, many countries that have suffered armed conflict continue to use children for various tasks, as it has been an established practice. The author argues that it is not necessarily harmful to their welfare, and in some occasions, it may offer some stability and augment self-confidence in times of uncertainty. Nevertheless, it becomes critical when conflict increases the use and engagement of children in harmful and exploitative manners. Military units are a main source of employment, and as it is in Colombia for instance, the national army has been known to be one of the major employers in the country. Moreover, as Colombia also has a high rate of trafficking, as is the case in many conflict zones, children are often sold to brothels, industry owners or into domestic servitude (Hart, 2002). In Figure 12, a 16 year-old female participant from the district of Aguablanca, in Cali shows the correlation between capital and forced displacement caused by politics and war on the opposite spectrum generating prostitution, drugs and violence. Many of the participants in Cali were or had been involved in some manner with one of the armed groups providing a diverse range of services as a means for survival and financial income. In 'Stories Behind the Promise', many young individuals share their perspectives of social inequality, poverty and the lack of governmental programs available for their community including education and work opportunities.

As poverty increases, the family structure and community bonds are destroyed, providing a vulnerability to the exploitation of children by corrupt parties with or without their expressed consent. Children in close proximity to armed camps and bases are especially vulnerable to recruitment (ibid). Interestingly, social inequality and poverty have been found to be causes of political violence, as has been shown in Colombia. Peter Waldmann (2007) confirms this assertion, stating that economic motives have played an important role in explaining the armed conflict and the existing culture of violence in Colombia. It is often referred to in Colombia as el rebusque or 'the hustling'; the struggle to make money using any means available, both legal and illegal. As a 17 year-old boy in Cali stated as we were discussing the present and future, “it is a matter of money and making it with what one has;” therefore, he could only think of joining one of the armed groups or becoming a ‘professional soldier’ as a means for economic survival.

As earlier argued, children are prominent agents in political conflicts (Boyden, 2004), which raises great issues in peace building processes: the actions of child participants in armed conflict do not conform to contemporary understandings of the ‘child’ (Berents, 2008) as passive victims. However, children clearly understand their circumstances and available options as discussed, and make
decisions of their own volition based on their perceptions of the world around them. Figures 10 and 11 depict children’s agency in creating a different community than that of daily violence and death. In Figure 10, children are participating in a community radio program in which they discuss issues and topics of their choice pertaining to their lives and communities, such as sexual abuse, joining an armed group, violence, and positive topics such as cultural events and educational opportunities. Figure 11 illustrates the solidarity among the inhabitants of Comuna 13 in Medellin and the participation of children in this process of sharing stories of hope.

CONCLUSIONS

The situation of war-affected children in Colombia is largely under-reported in academia, the media, and in the non-governmental and inter-governmental sphere, especially given the magnitude of the problem as compared to other conflict zones. Moreover, current intervention models targeting war-affected children in Colombia follow outdated or irrelevant discourses. As political violence can generate a shift in inter-generational dimensions, children will continue to acquire new identities and negotiate power and survival modes in an attempt to make sense of their lives. Thus, there is an urgent need for in-depth research to understand how childhood evolves in the conflict situation in Colombia, to redefine the criteria for identifying child soldiers, and to bridge the gap between the ‘rights’ accorded to children by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the realities of their lives in the context of other socio-cultural factors and influences.

Finally, introduced by anthropologists Caroline Moser and Cathy McIlwaine (2004), violence has become institutionalized in Colombia as a result of the protracted 55 year-old conflict. The institution of war is especially present for children who have not been exposed to any other lifestyle. Increased militarization by the former and current government to ‘fight’ insurgent groups has caused an increase in violence, forced displacement, use of children in armed conflict as child soldiers, and child trafficking within and across borders. A more in-depth examination of the roles of children in conflict beyond the traditional characterization of child soldiering via studies based on children’s own perspectives of the conflict can provide more nuanced insights into the children’s realities, which can in turn give rise to more adequate policies and interventions for the protection and welfare of war affected children.
REFERENCES


Press.


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APPENDIX A: Photographs of Workshops

Figure 1: Group discussion poster on important aspects of My Life. It translates as: Us, the Children and the War.

Figure 2: A 9 year-old draws her ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ in My Life

Figure 3: 16 year-old youth in Cali operating a video camera

Figure 4: Group Discussion: Your Problem Has a Solution! Look For It, Ok! Value Yourself… No To Silence! Defend Your Rights For What They are Worth…Group 8

Figure 5: Self-portrait session photography during the discussion of My Life

Figure 6: Drawing of My Neighborhood

Figure 7: ‘Politicians help narco-trafficking’

Figure 8: From the top to bottom: Colombia – World; War; Politics – Armed groups and Corruption; Money; Arms; Exportations;
Murders; Wars between neighborhoods; Daily injustice; Kidnappings; Drugs; My neighborhood: Politicians – Hitmen offices – People with necessities – Problems – Toasted

Figure 9: ‘War: There were lots of deaths by the guerrilla they took away our loved ones we had to go from there displaced leaving our lands’

Figure 10: Community Radio Program with the Participation of Children

Figure 11: Comuna 13 shares stories of hope: Without having studied journalism or know how to operate a camera, 25 children, youth, and adults measured up to be the narrators and protagonists of what happens in Comuna 13.

Figure 12: War <-> Prostitution and Drugs <-> Violence <-> Money and Displaced <-> Politics
ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to search into the phenomenon of child soldiering in post-Cold War Africa and so endeavours to propose an expected humanitarian role of both local (national governments and civil society organisations) and international (intergovernmental organisations) actors to safeguard the otherwise doomed future of many an African child. Although it has not been easy to prevent or contain civil wars in the aftermath of the Cold War, more so on the African continent, enormous efforts are being made by the international community including the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union as well as other intergovernmental organisations and national governments to provide care for refugees, internally displaced persons as well as ex-combatants, a good number of them being children. In a bid to contribute towards the already manifested efforts, the paper suggests both top-down and bottom-up approaches to protection against the odds of child soldiering in today's Africa.

Key terms: Child soldiers, armed conflict, psychosocial therapy, community reintegration
INTRODUCTION

The hard-won lesson of both world wars was that competing national security systems or military alliances lead to an arms race, which in turn leads to a situation where even a relatively small international misunderstanding or dispute in a sensitive area can trigger a major war. That was the reason why the founders of the United Nations were so anxious to establish a system of collective security.

(Urquhart, 1989)

In response to the massive atrocities that were experienced during World War I and II, the world powers (victors of the imperialist wars) spearheaded the establishment of the United Nations Charter and a set of international laws, presumably in order to prevent future wars from occurring. For over half a century since then, however, Africa has experienced a violent cycle of armed conflict and warfare. First, there came the armed struggles for independence which were followed by a series of civil wars. These civil wars have had many causes, including the struggle over artificial frontiers inherited from colonialism, friction and rivalry among different ethnic and religious groups, and the crude desire for power and natural resources.

This paper attempts to search into the phenomenon of child soldiering in post-Cold War Africa and so endeavours to propose an expected humanitarian role of both local (national governments and civil society organisations) and international (intergovernmental organisations) actors to safeguard the otherwise doomed future of many an African child. Although it has not been easy to prevent or contain a myriad of civil wars in the aftermath of the Cold War in Africa, efforts are being made by the international community including the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union as well as other international organisations and national governments to provide care for refugees and internally displaced persons, majority of whom being children.

Nonetheless, the recruitment of child soldiers, particularly in Africa, has long been a challenging issue; yet, political braveries to tackle it have been limited, and in some other instances wanting. Achvarina and Reich (2006) wrote that Africa has had the largest number of conflicts since the end of the Cold War, and it has also seen the highest military conscription of children in war. For a continent that is unfortunately poorly known and badly misunderstood to begin with, Woronoff (2008) wrote, it is often hard to find useful information about underlying situations, groups and people involved, and even the course of wars in contemporary Africa. No doubt, the notion and practice of an operational child protection mechanism have been somewhat alien to many governments in most Africa even today.
The use of children as soldiers has been universally condemned as abhorrent and unacceptable. Yet over the last two decades hundreds of thousands of children have fought and died in conflicts around the world, with special mention to Africa. Children involved in armed conflict and civil war atrocities (majority of whom boys) have not only been frequently killed or injured during combat or while carrying out other tasks; they have also been forced to engage in hazardous activities such as laying mines or explosives, as well as using weapons to kill their fellow community members. These and many other rebel related activities have had tremendous negative psychological effects on their human development processes now characterised with unhealthy physical and mental states.

Additionally, the less conspicuous but more pernicious predicament in terms of child soldiering in most contemporary African civil wars remains the issue of what Coulter referred to as ‘bush wives’ and ‘girl soldiers’. Exploring child soldiering in Sierra Leone’s protracted civil war, Coulter in *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers* (2009) expressed that the realities of life for girls in rebel forces in Africa’s civil wars remain largely unknown and consequently insufficiently explored. Even when war or rebel activities may appear to have ended, these girl children continue to slip below the humanitarian radar.

**CHILDREN OF WAR**

Conventionally, a child is supposed to enjoy love, care, and the protection of both the family and the community, against all sorts of threats. Paradoxically, however, the level of violence inflicted on children throughout the African continent has remained high yet children are seen as the sign of hope for and future of the nation to which they belong as well as a value-addition to the wider world with which they are to interact.

Unfortunately, no community is free of violence. Correspondingly, the risk of encountering violence, both against as well as by children, is much higher in some communities than in others. Children in Africa, for instance, bear disproportionate consequences of armed conflict. The 21st century continues to see patterns of children enmeshed in both intra- and inter-state violence between opposing combatant forces, as victims of terrorist warfare, and perhaps most tragically of all, as victims of civil wars. Children have also been deliberately targeted victims in genocidal civil wars in Africa in the past decade, and hundreds of thousands have been killed and maimed in the context of close-quarter, hand-to-hand assaults of great ferocity.

UNICEF reports on Rwandan publications stated that maternity clinics, orphanages, children’s homes, and schools were all systematically targeted during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. In this same context, an additional 100,000 children were separated from their families. By late 1995, only
12,000 children in Rwanda and 11,700 in eastern Congo had been reunified with their families, says UNICEF Report (1996). In the same period, over 12,000 children were crowded into 56 centres that had been turned into temporary orphanages, while more than 300,000 children had been taken in by families. In a UNICEF study of 3,030 children titled, "Exposure to War Related Violence among Rwandan Children and Adolescents," the statistics can tell the terrible story: More than two-thirds had actually seen someone being injured or killed, and 79 per cent had experienced death in their immediate families. Twenty per cent witnessed rape and sexual abuse, almost all had seen dead bodies, and more than half had watched people being killed with machetes and beaten with sticks. Children killed other children, forced or encouraged by adults. No doubt that the majority of the children—now youths—continue to have disturbing images, thoughts, and feelings despite attempts to remove the events from their memories.

Referring to the situation in northern Uganda, the following was said by the Former UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs:

Where else in the world have there been 20,000 kidnapped children? Where else in the world has 90 per cent of the population in large districts been displaced? Where else in the world do children make up 80 per cent of the terrorist insurgency movement? For me, the situation is a moral outrage.

[Jan Egeland, UN News Service, 2004 in Zeelen et al. (eds.), 2010]

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), an armed insurgency which emerged in the aftermath of the taking of power by the National Resistance Army (NRA) in 1986, has been fighting the ruling government of Uganda for over two decades. The LRA has been known for forced conscriptions, large scale atrocities, abductions of children for rebel activities, as well as rape and forced marriage of their female abductees. It is believed that tens of thousands of children have been abducted into the LRA and as an initiation ritual been forced to kill members of their families and communities.

Post-traumatic stress disorder remains an undertreated legacy of children who have been trapped in the shot and shell of battle as well as those displaced as refugees. An urgent, unfocused and unmet challenge has been the increase in, and plight of, child soldiers themselves. These children of war, Pearn (2003) wrote, are vulnerable to three profound sequelae in their adult lives. The first of these is that the desocialisation and dehumanisation of a young adolescent's mind becomes self-perpetuating. The excitement of interpersonal physical conflict, of combat, of dominance and of sexual violence entraps such victims. Second, the 'lost childhood' of these victims means that schooling and subsequent rehabilitation are very difficult. Third, although as yet there is no published work on the long-term sequelae of 'life and childhood in combat ranks', all who work with
children and adolescents, are aware of the inescapability of post-traumatic stress disorder. In particular, someone enmeshed throughout their formative years in society-induced psychopathy is very difficult to rehabilitate.

PHENOMENON OF AFRICAN CHILD SOLDIERING

Many a situation of political turmoil or civil war in today’s Africa have exposed children to mass kidnapping and abduction, so they (predominantly boys) can perform as fighters, porters, or be in support positions; girls have been used as sexual slaves. During turbulent times in Somalia’s southern and central regions, for example, one of the only ‘jobs’ available to young men (many of them under the age of 18) was and perhaps still is in clan militias, without whose protection civilian businesses or aid operations cannot function. These failures and/or absences of Governments (or State collapse) have impacted heavily on their communities.

Child soldiering phenomenon which has been ongoing throughout the armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for the last one and a half decade, is indeed striking. Thomas Lubanga, it was ascertained by BBC News of 23 January 2009, is the very first person to be brought to trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the recruitment of child soldiers into the military wing of his Union des Patriotes Congolais (UPC) militia. He [Lubanga] not only conscripted children under the age of 15 years into the military wing of UPC, but even used them to participate in hostilities in a conflict that took place between September 2002 and August 2003 as reported by ICC. It has been reported that there are currently an estimated 300,000 child soldiers worldwide, of which approximately 8,000 are in the eastern part of the DRC, a significant area of child soldier recruitment in the country (SOS Children’s Villages Canada).

All with personal experience of civil and guerrilla warfare are familiar with the secondary effects of social disruption on children’s lives. Schaller and Nightingale (1992) reported that in international war, or in civil war situations where there is a breakdown of law and order, exploitation of children in the form of child labour, child and teenage prostitution, child drug dealing and forced military service become accepted as the normal societal state. The 1998 Statute of the International Criminal Court has however defined as a war crime the conscription or enlistment of children under 15 years of age into the armed forces for their use in combat.

Child soldiers, as the term is used today, make up a new class of combatants distinct from those of immature years who have, since the times of ancient Greece, served in uniform as adjunct to the armies of the past. The child soldier of today, Pearn (2003) argued, reflects a triad of anarchic civil war, high technology and light-weight weaponry, and drug or alcohol addiction. Child soldiers have
no socialisation of any higher ethic other than that of violent exploitation to satisfy the dictates of short-term gratification of instinctual drives. In this article, the term “child soldiers” is used to reflect the Paris Principles (adopted by the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF) definition of children associated with armed forces and armed groups, to mean:

Any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed 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.

The tragic and new syndrome of child soldiering most often affects boys between the ages of 8 and 18 years; they are bonded into an armed group of peers, almost always orphans, drug or alcohol addicted, amoral, merciless and dangerous, illiterate, armed with an automatic or semiautomatic weapon and a knife; they rape, steal and pillage without compunction or remorse. Their targets are never strategic or tactical, but personal. They are opportunistic in their choice of victims, and do not discriminate between male or female, young or old, civilians or soldiers. The modus operandi of killing is often brutal, even involving mutilation. These child soldiers have become a phenomenon newly encountered in the late 20th century and accruing with a tragic currency in this new millennium.

**LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD PROTECTION**

Plattner (1984) ascertained that legal protection of children was introduced into international humanitarian law after the Second World War. From that time on, children, as members of the civilian population, were entitled to benefit from the application of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war. This came as the results of the many efforts by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Since the Second World War, the international community has witnessed the appearance of new kinds of conflicts. Methods and means of warfare have become increasingly sophisticated.Conflicts opposing regular armed forces and irregular combatants are more frequent. In modern warfare, losses are much more severe among civilians, including children.

Provisions in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment and other treaties, in particular regional human rights treaties, apply to violence against children in the community. These address harmful traditional practices, slavery, servitude, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment. Generally, the international humanitarian law
(IHL) is used to refer to the body of treaty law which regulates the conduct of hostilities and the protection of victims, children and adults alike. The Geneva Conventions, together with less formal codes of chivalry and humanitarian behaviour, form part of the broader theme of influence called the ‘Laws of War’. These Laws of War, Pearn (2003) reiterated, are an informal code of ethics, developed over more than 3000 years of recorded history, with the underlying ethos that an enlightened world insists that nations who prosecute combat do so at a level that is still above that of animalistic degradation.

In Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, violence is defined as: “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.” In relation to the protection of children, there is a striking difference in Protocol II between protection from the effects of the hostilities and protection from specific acts of ill-treatment. In the case of the former, there is no special mention of children. They are treated in the same way as other civilians. In the case of the latter, children benefit not only from the fundamental guarantees applicable to all civilians but also from a specific provision. They are to be provided with the care and aid they require. That includes, but is not confined to, education in keeping with the wishes of their parents, family reunion and, preferably with the consent of their parents or those responsible for their care, temporary removal from the conflict zone. The provisions also require that those under fifteen should not be recruited or allowed to take part in hostilities.

The first reference to the participation of children in armed conflicts appears to be in the 1977 Protocols to the Geneva Conventions. Article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has greatly captured this issue. Nonetheless, Article 77 of Protocol I already requires that Parties to an international conflict shall take "all feasible measures" to ensure that children under fifteen years of age do not take a direct part in hostilities.

With regards to the armed conflict that plagued the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in abject turmoil for over one and half decade, parties to the armed conflict in DRC recruited and used children. Widespread human rights abuses have been committed by armed groups in the DRC in the past ten years. All parties to the conflict have been responsible for violations. Among the worst violations are killings of civilians, forced recruitment of child soldiers, destruction of villages, internal displacement, cannibalism, rape and torture. At the time of their recruitment these children were trained to kill the enemy, rape women, and commit harassment, intimidation, and destruction of property (Mulunda, 2009). Because of the nature, intensity and duration of the armed conflicts during 1996 to 1997 and 1998 to 2008, these Congolese children have severely been traumatized.
and have experienced nightmares, difficulty in concentrating, depression and a sense of hopelessness about the future.

Hampson (1996) equally pointed to a couple of loopholes in the existing legal instruments expected to provide protection to children in armed conflicts. She [Hampson] first expressed that Article 77 of Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions fails to address a variety of issues. What constitutes taking "a direct part in hostilities" asked Hampson (1996)? Second, the Article refers to recruitment; however, it is not clear whether, as a matter of law, this covers every means by which a person may join armed forces. In particular, where a child is kidnapped and compelled to join or, at the other extreme, where a child simply joins a group of soldiers without going through any formal procedure, it is open to question whether recruitment in any meaningful sense has taken place first and foremost. Whereas the law clearly stipulates that children who have not attained the age of fifteen years shall neither be recruited in the armed forces or groups nor allowed to take part in hostilities, there is no mention of children between the ages of fifteen and eighteen years. Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, applicable in non-international conflicts, contains no provision at all in this area. Similarly, there is no mention at all of child Prisoners of War (Hampson, 1996).

TOWARDS A WAR-AFFECTED CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM: CONCLUSION

As the challenges facing post-Cold War African children are multifaceted, so too are the ways in which both the international community (through inter-governmental organisations) and local actors including national governments and civil society organisations could respond. In the same line, equally required are both top-down and bottom-up approaches to protection against the challenge of child soldiering. Specifically, top-down prevention approaches which can influence society-wide risk and protective factors ought to be balanced against bottom-up approaches which highlight local needs and also allocate prevention and protection responsibilities to local communities to which these war-affected children belong.

There is no doubt that schooling provides most children with their second most important source of socialisation after the family. This therefore makes school education a key element in setting up an operational child protection system. Reducing truancy as well as bringing early school leavers (drop-outs) back for school education is equally paramount in the same regard. The type of education they ought to pursue must remain holistic, in that, it is not only appealing to the intellect (head) but also to values—cultural and religious—(heart) and practices (hands). Certainly, provision of incentives for them to complete schooling, obtain vocational training and even pursue higher education ought to
be taken into account, most especially by local actors (national governments, local non-governmental organisations, and community-based initiatives).

Grotberg (1995) rightly noted that of foremost concern for child soldiers during and following armed conflicts is that something has happened to their family members/parents and/or significant caregivers. Therefore, to the extent that it is possible to keep families together, it will help lessen the trauma. Unnecessary separation and other dramatic changes thus ought to be avoided. In line with this, in the event where separation has inevitably been caused, then, attempts should be made to reunite the former child soldiers with close relatives as soon as possible. In due course, demobilised child soldiers should feel much safer and more protected because they have been confronted with losing their lives and are more traumatized than children who were a reasonable distance from the violence. Situations that put children in direct confrontation, even when they are not more dangerous than the situation they have already faced, should be avoided at any cost.

Equally important is the manner in which the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme ought to be taken as a fundamental intervention for ex-child-combatants that has to be formulated and administered to this end. DDR refers to that process of demilitarising official and unofficial armed groups (former child soldiers for this matter) by controlling and reducing the possession and use of arms, disbanding non-state armed groups and reducing the size of state security services and assisting former combatants to reintegrate into civilian life (Ball & Van de Goor, 2006). DDR finds its place in both the development and security agendas and a properly administered DDR gives peace-building a better chance of success (Maina, 2009).

However, in the case of post-war Sierra Leone for instance, Coulter (2009) noted that the ‘gender-blind’ DDR definition of ‘rebel’ limited access to assistance for most young women (formerly abducted girl children) whose wartime identities did not meet the required characteristics of a fighting soldier. Successful reintegration of child soldiers (regardless of gender identification) therefore largely depend on the post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building agenda which has to take into account factors that might have engineered child soldiering phenomenon prior to the outburst of civil wars.

Hence, situating the formerly abducted children’s true stories against the international humanitarian narratives of the war is key in both exposing and dealing with the deficiencies of the DDR programmes. In the attempt to ensure such successful reintegration, there is also need to mix the formerly recruited boy children as well as the formerly sexually enslaved girl children with the rest of
the children and adult members of the wider community so as to break down the ‘us against them’ attitude.

Ultimately, whereas DDR programmes tailored to effect the reintegration of former adult combatants have so often taken a minimalist approach, which aims to demobilise soldiers in order to prevent them from posing a security risk, there is greater need for another appropriate approach in the case of children, who are largely victims of circumstance. This approach ought to be maximalist, Muggah et al. (2003) argued, as it aims to create opportunities for children’s holistic human development by reintroducing them to school education or providing them with vocational training. Plausibly, such a specifically designed reintegration of former child soldiers into their original communities after having encountered brutal experiences of civil war and/or hostilities could most likely allow them rediscover their best possible selves and seize the chance to grow and live in the future they have always imagined.
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Applying lessons learnt from the reintegration of street children to children affected by armed conflict

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ABSTRACT

Following 20 years experience of working with street-connected children, Retrak has developed standard operating procedures for family reintegration, based on international guidelines and evidence, which clearly outline the principles and key steps that can support children with their families and communities in this process. Evidence has shown that after reintegration with families, the wellbeing of children improved compared with living on the street, demonstrating the efficacy of family reintegration. There are marked similarities between street-connected children and children affected by armed conflict including their origin, their experience of violated rights and levels of independence, their alienation and stigmatisation, their need for support in reconciling with family and community and the educational and psychosocial challenges they face. Based on these similarities Retrak’s family reintegration standard operating procedures could be applied to children affected by armed conflict to assist them in making a successful transition to living in their family and community.

Key words: street-connected children; children affected by armed conflict; family reintegration; wellbeing.

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INTRODUCTION

Life at home was good for Musa until one day his parents separated and his mother left home. Musa ran away as he missed his mother so much. Two years later Musa was living on the streets of Kampala. He had lost hope in everyone and everything.

When Retrak’s outreach workers met Musa in 2009 he was very sick and depressed. After getting to know the outreach workers he began coming to Retrak’s centre to receive food and medical care. He continued to gain further support through life-skills lessons and basic education classes.

In 2011 Musa was ready to visit his home again, accompanied by a Retrak social worker. To Musa’s great joy he found both his mother and father at home. The family couldn’t believe that Musa was still alive: they had looked for him for a long time but had given up all hope. Musa was relieved to learn that his parents had reunited and that it was possible for him to return home.

Retrak provided the family with support in enabling Musa to return to school and connected them with a nearby hospital so that Musa could continue treatment for TB. When his mother also needed the same treatment it was Musa that stood by her and encouraged to take her medication. Musa has also been able to improve the family’s wellbeing by using new farming methods he learnt at Retrak and he has carried on sharing other skills with children in his community.

Musa is just one example of over 1,200 children Retrak has helped to return to family and community after living on the streets of cities and towns across Africa.

Retrak is a UK-based INGO that works with street-connected and highly vulnerable children, their families and communities, with the vision of ensuring that zero children are forced to live on the streets.

Retrak began as a football club for street boys in Kampala in 1994 and now operates across 5 countries in Africa offering a comprehensive set of services to street-connected children, as well as providing support to families and communities to reduce the number of children turning to life on the streets. In 2012 Retrak worked with over 9,000 street-connected and highly vulnerable children and their care-givers. We undertake research, advocacy and collaborative activities, nationally and internationally, by listening and engaging children’s voices, in order to influence policy and practice in their favour.

This paper brings together Retrak’s experience from nearly 20 years of practice with street-connected children in Africa with our more recent research and programmatic development from the last 4 years.
In 2011, as part of a 3-year USAID funded project, Retrak set out to develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) for key programmes, including family reintegration which is at the centre of Retrak’s work. The family reintegration SOPs were developed by a team of Retrak practitioners, and the children and their families with whom Retrak works have given input into the design of the SOPs during a period of field testing in both Uganda and Ethiopia.

In addition Retrak has developed a training curriculum for social workers and other staff involved in family reintegration. This is designed to be highly participatory and build on the local knowledge and experience of participants. The training methods create opportunities for staff to reflect on case studies based on real stories of children undergoing the reintegration process. Small group work ensures opportunity for reflection and discussion on the principles and steps within the SOPs. Retrak piloted this training curriculum in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2012 and has since run workshops with participants from Kenya, Uganda and DR Congo. Feedback from these workshops has been very positive and has resulted in changes to practice on the ground. In addition Retrak has been able to influence policy through international and national forums which are looking at reintegration and alternative care.

In addition, Retrak recently undertook research into the outcomes of reintegration programmes which have shown how returning street-connected children to their families leads to improvements in their wellbeing, this research will be discussed further later (Corcoran & Wakia, 2013). Another study, endorsed by UNICEF Ethiopia, found that Retrak’s family reintegration SOPs are suitable for use with other groups of children outside of family care (Kauffman & Bunkers, 2012).

This paper will set our Retrak’s learning around family reintegration, and will especially look at how this learning can be applied to work with children affected by war.

SIMILARITIES OF STREET-CONNECTED AND WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN
As part of Retrak’s research into family reintegration during the development of our SOPs, a background literature review yielded very little formally published literature on reintegration interventions for street-connected children. Whilst the last two decades have seen considerable research concerning street-connected children’s lifestyles and needs there is little concrete evidence on effective interventions, including family reintegration (James-Wilson 2007, Thomas de Benítez, 2007 and 2011).

Wider literature searches on the reintegration of children without parental care revealed much more material concerning other groups of children, including child soldiers, looked-after children, child
prisoners, refugees and child-headed households. A review of the literature suggested that child soldiers had significant similarities with street-connected children which would aid a comparison.

Both street-connected children and child soldiers come from fragile rural communities and have been pushed away due to poverty, lack of opportunities and family breakdown (Peters, 2007, Wakia, 2010, Wessells, 2005). Many of their rights have been violated, including the right to bodily security, health care, education, play, justice and self-expression (CIDA 2005, Thomas de Benítez, 2007). They have lived away from their families and communities and become alienated. On their return they are often viewed as outsiders and are stigmatised because their experiences are unknown and outside the norm (Betancourt et al, 2010, Corbin, 2008, Thomas de Benítez, 2007).

In addition, many street-connected children and child soldiers have had opportunities to develop in new roles and take on new responsibilities. They have been active agents in their lives; gaining power and status amongst their peers. For many these peer relationships have become more important than their families, so that any move away from these peers becomes challenging (Annan et al, 2006, Boyden, 1997, McAlpine et al, 2010, Stovel, 2008).

Whilst there are of course difficulties in transferring learning from one context to another and from one group of children to another, there is value in drawing key principles of good practice (Stark et al 2009). Retrak has experienced that the lessons learnt the reintegration of child soldiers were useful to the development of family reintegration procedures for street-connected children, and as mentioned above, a review of these SOPs highlighted that they are suitable for use with other children outside of family care. This is particularly the case for child soldiers and other children separated from their families due to war given the similarities with street-connected children outlined above.

For ease, this paper will use the terms street-connected children and war-affected children in the rest of the paper. Street-connected children are children who have spent time living and/or working on the streets. War-affected children is used here to specifically mean children who have been separated from their families due to the conflict, but who remain in their home country or region where the conflict has now subsided or ended. It is recognised that these are broad terms and their definition often contested. It is also noted that Retrak’s current SOPs have not been tested in ongoing conflict situations.

FAMILY REINTEGRATION
Recent international research and policies have reemphasized that the ideal situation for the growth and development of a child is within a caring family (Clay et al, 2012, Williamson & Greenberg,
Children who grow up outside the care of a family are at greater risk of poor development (Csáky, 2009, Williamson & Greenberg, 2010) and are “more vulnerable to malnutrition and long-term poverty, less likely to attend school and more likely to die young or suffer from maternal and reproductive health problems in adolescence.” (Delap et al, 2009)

Therefore for a child who has been separated from their family, there is a general consensus that the best possible scenario is for that child to be returned to the protection of their family. This process, usually called family reintegration, is central to the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children which highlights that interventions “should primarily be directed to enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents, or when appropriate, other close family members.”(UN, 2010, para 3)

RETRAK’S MODEL

Retrak aims to successfully return street-connected children to safe homes in families and communities, where each child feels a sense of belonging through a secure attachment to caring adults. Retrak’s model provides the framework for our activities, ensuring we provide consistent care to both children and their families and communities as they journey with us (see figure 1 and Retrak, 2011).

This journey involves both children and families. For children, it begins with outreach while they are still on the streets. The next step involves actively dealing with past experiences, identifying strengths and resources and exploring future choices. New attachments may come through family reintegration, foster care or independently with support in a community.
Success depends equally on families and communities. Their journey begins by making contact through home visits, community activities and recruiting foster carers and community mentors. Retrak works alongside each care-giver, through training and resourcing so they can build healthier environments to nurture and support their children.

Retrak ensures success continues through follow-up and care for each child, their siblings, caregivers and the whole household, as well as involving the wider community to provide support.

**FAMILY REINTEGRATION PRINCIPLES**

Retrak strives to ensure that our work is in line with international and national guidelines and research. Therefore a critical part of the development of the SOPs was to base them on international evidence and provide guidance on good practice which could be applicable beyond Retrak’s own work. The UN Alternative Child Care Guidelines, with the goal of supporting “efforts to keep children in, or return them to, the care of their family or, failing this, to find another appropriate and permanent solution”, are a natural foundation for Retrak’s SOPs and are themselves based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Alongside this is a growing body of research on alternative care, attachment theory and child development which Retrak has drawn on to guide our work (for instance: Delap et al, 2009, Schofield & Beek, 2006, Williamson & Greenberg, 2010). This grounding on universally accepted and applicable conventions, guidelines and evidence means that the SOPs’ principles are applicable to any group of children separated from their family, including war-affected children.
Retrak’s principles for successful family reintegration are:

- see family as the first priority;
- be child-centred;
- (re)build positive attachments between child and care-givers; and
- involve community in providing support.

Family reintegration should always be the first priority when considering long-term care options (UN, 2010). Since the family is seen as “the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth, wellbeing and protection of all its members and particularly children” (UN, 1989, preamble) it is important to explore whether a child separated from his family can be returned to the care of his parents or biological relatives, and whether this would be in the child’s best interest.

It should also be recognised that every child is unique and should be dealt with on an individual basis. For many children their journey back to family care is long and complicated – there can be no one size fits all solution. Furthermore working with children individually helps to promote their participation, in respect of their “right to be consulted and to have his/her views duly taken into account in accordance with his/her evolving capacities” (UN, 2010, para 6), and ensures that their safety and security is paramount and all decisions are grounded in the best interests of the child (UN, 2010).

Reintegration interventions should place great emphasis on the importance of rebuilding attachments between child and care-giver. Every child needs a two-way bond with their care-giver to enable them to feel secure and valued, which will in turn help them build future relationships (Safe Families Safe Children, 2011). Attachment is necessary for every child whatever the child’s situation, but the need for this relationship for vulnerable children is paramount if they are to overcome their past experiences and grow and develop successfully (Retrak, 2011). This focus on attachments means modelling positive attachments during project activities and recognizing the importance of working closely with both care-giver and child to help rebuild relationships and improving parenting skills.

Finally, a family needs the support from its surrounding community if it is to prosper. Therefore as well as working to improve relationships within a family, it is important to facilitate a family’s connections within their community, so that support and guidance can be obtained locally.
FAMILY REINTEGRATION KEY STEPS

Key steps in the reintegration process are:

- building trusting relationships with children and working with them individually to determine their best interests;
- assessing the family’s situation, providing support, and building understanding of the child’s experiences;
- supporting the child and family through placement;
- regularly following-up and assessing needs and wellbeing, and taking swift action if a child is at risk; and
- gradually phasing out support (see figure 2).

**Steps 1: Child assessment and preparation**

The aim of this step is to get to know a child who has been separated from their family and has come into contact with the project (usually through other activities run by the project). By doing this a project worker (for instance a social worker or case manager) will be able to help a child consider the possibility of returning to their family and will learn about their background in order to make an initial assessment. Key to achieving this is building a trusting relationship with the child and working with them individually.

Investing the time to build up trust between project workers and children is essential. Children who have been separated from their families, whether on the streets or due to conflict, will have gone through experiences which make them prone to distrust adults (Cairns, 2002, Safe Families Safe Children, 2011). This means that at the beginning project workers must ensure that children feel valued and offer them a caring, consistent, non-judgmental and reliable relationship. Achieving this requires a lot of patience and time.

Attachment theory demonstrates the importance of children having a secure base from which they can explore the world. This secure base enables children to successfully learn and develop and to understand the world and their place within it (Prior & Glaser, 2006, Schofield & Beek, 2006). When children have not had this experience at home or have gone through traumatic experiences it is
important to “to provide an experience of a secure attachment that allows the child ... to develop a new internal working model enabling them to relate [with others] differently, to leave behind traumas of the past and to live more fully in the present” (Safe Families Safe Children, 2011). By building up a strong relationship with a child project workers will be able to support that child to access opportunities and begin to make sense of their experiences. A close attachment will help a child face the challenges ahead and reduce the likelihood that they will give up when it becomes difficult (Safe Families Safe Children, 2011).

As project workers get to know a child – how they feel and think and what their past experiences have been – they will be able to support them to access further services and to make decisions about the future. It also helps the project worker, with input from the child, to determine whether family reintegration is in the child’s best interests, and what barriers may exist and to begin to plan how these can be overcome.

Further services which can be offered alongside the relationship building and psychosocial support could include health care, education, food and shelter. For both street-connected and war-affected children, these services, often provided at transition centres, create the space for children to begin to move away from the lifestyles they have previously adopted (Boothby et al 2006, Peters 2007, Volpi 2002, Zack-Williams 2006). However, whilst these centres can often focus on behaviour change as the main goal (Boothby et al 2006, Peters 2007), when pursuing the goal of reintegration the emphasis should be on building relationships and modelling positive attachments creating which should eventually lead to the desired behaviour change due to internal change. It is imperative that flexibility is built into programmes in order to adapt to each child’s situation and needs.

**Step 2: Family contact and assessment**

The aim of this step is to trace the family and find out if they are interested in reunifying with the child, to assess the family’s situation and provide any necessary support.

Just as it is important to begin building a relationship with the child, it is important to recognise that the child’s family, parents, siblings and others, also need a safe space to reflect on their situation and what has happened to their child whilst they have been away from home. Although some families will be hostile from the beginning, many just need time to hear about what their child has gone through and to prepare for receiving them back.

There can often be an assumption that street-connected and war-affected children cannot return home, either because the child or family will not be willing. However, evidence for both groups of children has clearly shown that this is not the case (Boothby et al 2006, Corbin 2008, Smith & Wakia.
Indeed it has been shown that family play a key role in the process and should be fully involved (Annan et al, 2009, Corbin 2008, Safe Families Safe Children, 2011).

The prospect of returning home can be challenging for both street-connected and war-affected child. They may be afraid of returning to their family if they feel they will be judged for their past actions (Aptekar 1991, Betancourt et al 2010, Corbin 2008, Thomas de Benítez 2007). However, since rural homes can be hard to locate it is often necessary for the child to assist in locating his home. If this is the case the child’s allocated social worker with whom they have a trusting relationship should accompany the child and stay with them to support and protect them.

It is important that project workers take time to oversee the reconciliation between the child and his family through facilitating a discussion and emphasizing the child’s needs and desires. An assessment should be made of the family’s situation and the care and support they would be able to offer the child. This should include their current situation and also the potential support available at the community and local level. Together with the family, and with community involvement if appropriate, plans should be made for the way forward.

**Step 3: Placement**

Once it has been determined that reintegration is in the child’s best interest and that both the child and family is in agreement, the next step is to support the child and family through the placement process.

It is important that both the child and family are prepared for the placement in advance and are given opportunities to express any concerns. During the actual placement visit it is important to make another assessment of the family situation and ensure that adequate support has been given or is planned in the areas of parenting skills, education/training, health care and economic strengthening.

Engaging with the community and seeking local support for the child and family is vital, especially if the family is some distance away from the project base. However care should also be taken to prevent stigmatisation and respect a child’s right to confidentiality (this is explored further below).

**Step 4: Follow-up and family support**

Once a child has been placed in the care of their family ongoing support should be offered to ensure the placement remains in the child’s best interest. This also offers an opportunity to build the capacity of the family. Family support may include counselling, for both the child and care-giver, parenting guidance, business training and educational or health support.
Reintegration can be a long process as both the child and family need to be given time to adjust. Many children need to adapt to living in a family situation again and to move forward from the behaviours and attitudes they learnt while they were away. Similarly the family will also have changed and may need to understand their child afresh.

Ideally follow-up visits should be done in person to allow for observation and interaction with family members. They could be undertaken by the child’s social worker, or by a local community worker, depending on the situation of the child and family. If necessary a health worker or livelihoods specialist could also be involved and visits to the child’s school or other community groups could also be included.

As noted above, it can be useful to involve the wider community and significant people in the life of the child. This might include friends, community members, local leaders, school teachers or church elders. Doing this helps the child to re-forgc their identity and ensures that he has a strong support network should they encounter problems during the reintegration process.

The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children state “Various complementary methods and techniques should be used for family support ... directed towards both facilitating intra-family relationships and promoting the family’s integration within its community” (UN, 2010, para 34). It has been shown for war-affected children that intentional efforts to engage with community can improve children’s adaptive attitudes, confidence and pro-social and behaviour amongst the children and lower levels of hostility, depression and overall distress (Betancourt et al 2005 & 2010). However it should also be noted that change at the community level can be slow and may initially only be surface-deep (Annan et al 2009, Stovel, 2008).

During this phase of follow-up and support, it is important that assessments continue to be made of the family situation and the child’s wellbeing, and that swift action is taken if a child is deemed to be at risk.

**Step 5: Phase out**

Follow-up and support should always be done with the view of gradually phasing out. Once a family is clearly progressing well and is able to continue without support then a recommendation to end support should be discussed by the family’s social worker and his colleagues. If this is agreed then phase out can be explained to the family, but with the encouragement to remain in contact, especially if any problem arises. Ensuring that the child and family are well connected within their local community will also help them to continue successfully.
MONITORING CHILDREN’S WELLBEING DURING REINTEGRATION

In 2011 Retrak began using the Child Status Index (CSI), developed by Measure Evaluation (O’Donnell et al., 2009), with street-connected children as a system to monitor changes in children’s wellbeing during the reintegration journey. A recent Retrak study has reviewed the use of the CSI in this initial pilot period, up to the end of 2012, at Retrak’s programmes in Ethiopia and Uganda (Corcoran & Wakia, 2013). This pilot study demonstrated that Retrak’s reintegration programmes are successful in improving children’s wellbeing and that the CSI is a useful tool to monitor these programmes.

Retrak conducts CSI assessments with children on the streets as they begin to access centres (baseline); at the point of reintegration with their families (placement); and during follow-up in their families (these are categorised into 3 timeframes: follow-up within 6 months, between 6 months and 1 year, and more than 1 year since placement).

The 12 indicators of wellbeing in the CSI are given a score between 1 and 4, with 4 indicating “good” and 1 “very bad”. Children scoring 1 or 2 for any indicator are considered to be at risk in that area of wellbeing. In order to preserve the multidimensional nature of wellbeing the scores were analysed using spider plots showing all 12 indicators on separate axes, and comparing each of the stages of the reintegration journey (see figure 3 showing the results for Ethiopia).

The study revealed a considerable improvement in all aspects of wellbeing as children move from the streets and into family reintegration in both Ethiopia and Uganda. When looking at different areas of wellbeing it is noted that:

- in both countries, performance and access to education is much slower to improve than other areas;
- in Ethiopia emotional health and social behaviour are also slower to change; and
- in Uganda some issues with food security, shelter and legal protection are persistent.
The study concluded that reintegration of street-connected children is a successful intervention and that, given the risks and costs of institutional care (Csáky, 2009, Delap et al, 2009, Williamson & Greenberg, 2010), deinstitutionalisation must be encouraged and family reintegration promoted as the first priority.

In addition, the study recommended a greater focus on education and psychosocial wellbeing, which resonate with other studies looking at war-affected children.

Retrak’s study highlighted that reintegration programmes must assist street-connected children to re-enter formal education, both through education and skills programmes prior to reintegration and through addressing inadequacies in access and quality of formal education. National governments and education authorities must ensure that education systems are able to meet the needs of vulnerable children, since quality education can be a protective factor that prevents children leaving home as well as assisting street-connected children as they return home. Programmes serving war-affected children have also found that “education has great potential for helping heal past traumas and preventing future conflict” (Betancourt et al, 2008, p583), but also that there are considerable difficulties in assisting children’s return to education (Annan et al, 2006, Betancourt et al 2005).
Retrak’s study has also shown that in order to meet street-connected children’s psychosocial needs it is vital to provide counselling and psychosocial support, to ensure every child has a solid foundation on which to build a strong attachment with a capable care-giver, and to foster support amongst the wider community. Again this issue is critical for war-affected children: it has been shown that for many children psychosocial wellbeing is slow to change, but that formal assistance, family connectedness and peer support are key protective factors (Annan et al 2006, Betancourt et al 2005).

Finally, Retrak’s study highlights the importance of repeat assessments of children’s wellbeing. This information can be used to aid case management, monitor children’s wellbeing and evaluate programme outcomes. When used well this information will ensure that interventions are effective and of high quality, as well as informing the wider evidence base from which policy-makers and practitioners can draw.

CONCLUSION
Following 20 years experience of reintegrating street-connected children, Retrak has developed SOPs for family reintegration which clearly outline the principles and key steps which can support children with their families and communities in this process. Evidence from a recent study has shown that after reintegration with their families, the wellbeing of children improved on all indicators measured compared with living on the street, demonstrating the efficacy of family reintegration (Corcoran & Wakia, 2013).

There are marked similarities between street-connected children and children affected by war including their origin, their experience of violated rights and levels of independence, and their alienation and stigmatisation.

Furthermore, studies of reintegration programmes targeting war-affected children have shown that they face similar challenges as street-connected children in their reintegration journey. War-affected children may need a period of time in a safe space, such as a transition centre, to adjust and begin to rebuild positive relationships (Boothby et al 2006, Peters 2007, Zack-Williams 2006). Family should play a key role in the reintegration process, especially with support to facilitate reconciliation (Annan et al, 2009, Betancourt et al 2010, Corbin 2008). Community assistance can provide valuable support to families and help children adapt to family life again (Betancourt et al 2005 & 2010). Education has an important role to play in helping children move forward, if it can be facilitated effectively; and psychosocial support must be provided, at a centre and from family and friends, as this area of wellbeing is slow to change(Annan et al 2006, Betancourt et al 2005).
Based on these similarities of war-affected and street-connected children’s background and needs, and the efficacy of Retrak’s reintegration programmes, it is concluded that Retrak’s family reintegration SOPs could be applied to children affected by war to assist them in making a successful transition to living in their family and community.

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Street children in post war areas in Uganda: Experience with violence and access to protective services

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ABSTRACT

The combined effects of the conflict between the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and government forces in northern Uganda, and cattle rustling in the north east, are partly reflected in the growing number of children living and/or working on the streets in these regions. There is a great fear that the violent conflict that lasted nearly two decades (1986-2006) in Acholi and Lango region, coupled with the incessant cattle rustling in the Karamoja region have contributed to the growing number of children on the streets and may be responsible for some of the violence they face while on the streets. In this study, we reveal that children on the street in these regions experience different forms of violence, some of which could be attributable to the impact of war/conflict. The children are not only victims of violence, but also perpetrators of violence against their peers. We further shed light on access to protective services by the affected children. The paper is based on structured interviews and focus group discussions with a sample of children living and/or working on the street, and Key Informant interviews with service providers. The findings form part of a nationwide study on violence against children living and/or working on the streets in Uganda’s capital city and major towns. The paper makes recommendations on addressing violence against children in post war affected areas and puts emphasis on augmenting access to preventive, protective and promotive services within the framework of creating a protective environment for children.

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INTRODUCTION
Uganda like several African countries has had a history characterized by civil instability in various parts of the country since attaining independence. While some instabilities have been short lived for example the one that followed the overthrow of Muteesa government soon after independence in 1966, others have been more protracted. Examples include the war that led to the overthrow of Idi Amin by the Tanzanian troops in 1979 and the civil war that led to the removal of Obote II and Lutwa governments between 1980 and 1986. These wars coupled with practices such as cattle rustling in north eastern part of the country (Karamoja and Teso) have had devastating effects on the families and the subsequent exodus of children to the streets. This article focuses on those areas that have had a disproportionate impact of the civil instability resulting from the armed rebellion by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) against the Uganda People’s Defense Forces (UPDF) in north and north eastern Uganda between 1986 and 2006, and how the aftermath of the war is linked to the phenomenon of street children and the violence they experience or that which they perpetrate against their peers in these post war areas.

Similar to other civil instabilities, the war in north and north eastern parts of Uganda is associated with devastation not only of the physical infrastructure, but also the social and cultural fabric of the affected communities. Various authors point to the fact that war directly increases the number of children on the streets when children and their families run away from war zones and seek refuge on the streets(Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003; James-Wilson, 2007; Ray, Corrine, & Nolan, 2011; Vinck & Pham, 2009; WHO, 2000). Existing figures do not provide estimates of persons killed. However, the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated in 2005 that the 20 year civil strife left more than 1.8 million people displaced (UNOCHA, 2005: pp2), with over 20,000 children abducted according to the Uganda Human Rights Commission(UHRC, 2004). During the war, people were forced to live in the congested internally displaced camps, where services like health, water were grossly inadequate. Under the circumstances, the HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in northern Uganda districts rose to above 8 percent (for example Gulu recorded 8.2%) compared to national average of 6.4 percent(Ministry of Health, 2005). It is not surprising that such situations contributed the problem of orphans and other vulnerable children in the region.

A combination of conflict and poverty has left the Karamoja region which is part of the north-eastern Uganda lagging far behind other regions both in social and economic development. This is also the case with northern Uganda. For Karamoja, the Human Development Index indicators in Karamoja remain the worst in Uganda with only 19 percent of children aged 6-12 going to school compared to the national average of 83 percent (WFP Karamoja Facts & Figures, December 2006). Children ages 7-18 years who have never been to school are 80 percent compared to the 9 percent national average. The conflict in the region caused by cattle rustling has not only disrupted social
order, structures and economic activities but has also destroyed property and the infrastructure upon which livelihood and development of the region depends. Consequently, practices such as child trafficking are thriving in families where children are sold into forced labour in exchange for commercial gains (UYDEL, 2009; Walakira, 2009). Trafficked children often end up enslaved in child domestic work and street begging; they work as bar and restaurant attendants, sex workers, strippers and vendors (Walakira, 2009). Others have perished through ritual murders (Mukuye & Ddumba-Nyanzi, 2009). Indeed, civil strife and insecurity due to cattle rustling; severe drought and poverty, all have been blamed for trafficking of children.

Poverty in north and north eastern Uganda is viewed as consequence as well as a cause of conflict and is directly linked to the phenomenon of 'street children'. It manifests in terms of malnutrition, limited access to education, prevalence of diseases among children, lack of accommodation and poor sanitation. The incidence of poverty in northern Uganda stands 46.2% which is higher than the national average of 24.5% (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Higher poverty levels translate into higher levels of vulnerability for children. The Uganda Bureau of Statistic indicates that 80 percent of the children in northern Uganda are vulnerable compared to the national average of 65 percent (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Further evidence from the Situational Analysis report by Kalibala and Elson shows that the magnitude of 'critically' vulnerable children is highest in the conflict-affected north (9.3%) compared to the national average of 8.1 percent. Other regions have percentage scores ranging from 7.5 to 8.1 percent (Kalibala & Elson, 2010).

The devastating effect of AIDS in fueling the increase in the number of vulnerable children and those pushed to the streets cannot be underestimated. HIV prevalence levels have declined from 30 percent in the early 1980 to presently 7.3 percent (Ministry of Health, 1997, 2012; Ministry of Health & ORC Macro, 2006) (However, an estimated 1.2 million people are living with HIV, including 150,000 children (Government of Uganda, 2010). Of the estimated 17.1 million children below 18 years in 2009, 14 percent (approximately 2.43 million) were orphaned largely due to AIDS. AIDS affects the most productive persons in a family and is linked to diminished productivity, dwindling incomes among care givers, domestic violence and cases of child neglect and abandonment. The likelihood of these contributing to children's presence on the streets and experience of violence may not be farfetched.

Besides the above, children's presence on the streets is interpreted by some as a consequence of urbanization (S. Thomas de Benitez, 2011; Thomas de Benitez & Hiddleston, 2011), family dysfunction, school failure and poverty (James-Wilson, 2007). Pinheiro particularly describes the linkage of 'street' children with the ills of urbanization in the 19th century and the call for remedy and social reform (Pinheiro, 2006). Some describe the behavior of 'street' children as an indicator of
circumstances where they come from and or the reasons for being on the streets. Within this frame, they are associated with poor neighborhoods and come from dysfunctional and violent families; are viewed as social deviants and perpetual criminals who engage in risky survival behavior such as scavenging, petty thieving and drug use, begging and prostitution; while others view them as helpless victims of hunger and violence (Meincke, 2011; Pinheiro, 2006; Ray et al., 2011; S. Thomas de Benitez, 2011). More often, the stereotypes make the children susceptible to social exclusion and state led violence.

THE EXPERIENCE OF CONFLICT AND INTERNALIZATION OF VIOLENCE

The war in northern Uganda is not only the longest witnessed, but also one of the most brutal where acts of violence were committed against all persons irrespective of age, gender, and religious or cultural background. Children and adults were forced to commit acts of murder, raped, forced into marriages and slavery; forced to raze communities through plundering and setting ablaze houses (GUSCO, 2003; HURIPEC, 2003; Rubin, 1998; UHRC, 2004). The war undoubtedly will have a profound and long lasting impact on the lives of children and adults who witnessed it and those who came after. Based on Albert Bandura’s Bobo Doll experiments of 1961-63 (Bandura, 1965) and his Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), it is clear that people learn through observation. Children, as the experiments suggest, learn by observing those around them who serve as their role models. They imitate their behaviors and are likely to reproduce similar behavior. Thus, there is a higher likelihood that children who witnessed war from 1996 until 2006 and those who stay with parents exposed to the brutal war, are more likely to exhibit violent behavior.

The world health organization has acknowledged that prolonged exposure to armed conflict contributes to a culture of terror that increases the incidence of youth violence (Krug et al 2002). Bandura further observed that learning is more effective if the observed behavior is reinforced in an individuals’ daily life (Haralambos, Holborn, & Heald, 2000). Street situations seem to provide an environment that supports violent behavior particularly where children belong to gangs and other social groups. Whereas exposure to violence in the family is a stronger predictor of aggression in childhood than in adolescence, peer influences have been found to be more important in adolescence, therefore exposure to violent peers is a stronger predictor of violence among adolescents (Wortley, 2008).

There is also evidence that regarding interpersonal violence, young people are more likely to engage in negative activities when such behavior is encouraged and approved by friends, peers have the potential to shape an individual’s behavior (Krug et al 2006). This study does not intend to determine whether earlier exposure to violence explains street children’s behavior. What it intends
to do however, is to measure the prevalence of violent behavior against children and try to understand who the perpetrators are and if the affected children have access to protective services.

THE NEED TO PRIORITISE CHILDREN IN STREET SITUATIONS

Most worrying within the discourse on 'street' children or children in 'street' situations, is the limited attention paid to their safety and welfare particularly if they are children associated with war or have an experience of violent conflict. Examining the prevalence of violence against children in street situations is particularly very critical given the prioritization of elimination of violence against children by the United Nations. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 19 (1-2) obligates states parties to “take all appropriate measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.” The CRC further recommends the provision of “necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement”.

While this is the case, there is conspicuous marginalization of these children in research, policy and programming. In research, no significant investment has been made to establish the number of children on the streets. For more than a decade, the children on the streets continue to be estimated to number 10000 (ANPPCAN, 2011; Walakira, 2009). With no viable research about these children, no clear strategy is in place to attend to their plight. These children have also been noted as one of the hardest groups to protect and also reach with vital services (Salo, 2009). Studies point out that they are better protected if they are accessed with services that are sensitive to their multiple deprivation and street connectedness (Ray et al., 2011; S. Thomas de Benitez, 2011). We hope that the findings in respect of their situation should open our eyes and encourage prioritization of these children in research, policy and initiating practical programs that target them.

METHODS

The data used for this article was derived from a larger study conducted about street children in the major towns of Uganda. The overall study employed a mixed methods design using a modified screening tool developed by the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN).

Data was collected through a survey of a representative sample of children living and/or working in the streets. The primary study population comprised children aged 11-17 years both boys
and girls. Although the study initially sought to interview an equal number of boys and girls, it emerged during field work that there were more boys than girls living and or working on the street, there were therefore more male respondents than females.

For the survey, a four-step process was used to obtain a sample of street children. First, at each of the two OVC areas the major towns were purposively selected that is Moroto, Kotido, Kitgum, Gulu and Lira. Within each town, specific localities or streets where more children work or live were identified. These were the clusters from the final sample of respondents were selected.

Participants in the Focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were selected using purposive and quota sampling. A total of 6 FGDs were conducted with street children and IDIs conducted with key. Other study participants comprised relevant stakeholders; policymakers, law enforcement actors, service providers, community and religious leaders. This was supplemented by desk-based reviews of relevant documents from secondary sources. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS Version 13 for analysis; the qualitative data was thematically analyzed following the study objectives.

PROFILE OF THE STREET CHILDREN
The study comprised 151 children from the two OVC regions of northern and north eastern Uganda, constituting 26% of the countrywide study sample. Sample composition was 55.6% male and 44.4% female. The biggest proportion (40.4%) of children were in the 11-13 year age category, and 31.1% of between 14-15 years, whereas 28.5% were between 16-17 years. Most of them had ever been to school (79.5%), even though most of these (84.2%) had only a few years of primary education. About 36.7% of all respondents were attending school at the time of the survey, and majority of these were in primary grades. For the children not attending school, it was mainly because they could not afford (57.9%), while for 13.2% the need to work kept them out of school. About 7.3% of the children had observable physical disabilities. Most of the children that were found on the street were orphans (59.6%) with 53.3% of these being single orphans.

Reasons for living and or working on the street
While giving the reasons for working and or living on the streets, 12.6% and 13.9% of the children cited violence and neglect at home, respectively; about the same proportion were on the street because they had dropped out of school. A sizable majority (39.1%) worked or lived on the street in order to support their families. For children that had come to the streets due to abuse, violence and neglect at home most had experienced beating such as kicking, slapping (35%); whipping and caning (10%) and being screamed at loudly and aggressively (10%). FGD participants also explained some of the reasons that led them to the streets, and voices obtained are substantiated below:
For me when I see people who are very okay like parents walking with their children... I start to wish being with them but you find some of us are from polygamous families, may be parents have all died and poor families so we lack parental love. All this forces us to come for a living in the streets, (Fourteen year old boy, FGD Gulu).

To some children, gendered roles at home besides other concerns played a role for them running to the streets as they viewed some work as an abuse by parents:

Some of us are much secure to stay [on the street] than at homes because our parents like torturing us in deferent ways; beating us, overworking even you are forced to do ‘work’ which girls are supposed to do (sixteen year old boy, FGD Moroto).

Most of the children interviewed said they had lived and or worked on the street for a period of 1-3 years (45%), 18.5% had been there for more than four years. A significant majority reported that they slept in an owned or rented house (43%), 15.2% slept on the street, and 8.6% slept in a shelter. The rest mentioned sleeping in other places that included church/mosque, market, parks, railway stations, bus stations, abandoned houses. Majority of the respondents (76.8%) reported to consider their current sleeping place as a permanent sleeping space. For the few that did not consider the current place of abode as permanent, this was because the Police/night guard objected (20%); majority cited not having the money to secure the place, while some children said that their current place of abode was not secure. About 37.3% of the children slept on a mat whereas 35.3% of the respondents slept on a plastic/paper sack.

Most of the children said that they stayed with other children (32.5%), while 25.2% stayed with children and adults, 22.5% stayed with adults only whereas 18.5% said they stayed on their own on the street. More than half (52.3%) and almost a third (30.5%) of the children stayed with their parents and relatives before they came to the streets For majority of the children (54.3%) their parents or relatives were aware that they lived and/or worked on the streets. This implies that there are high levels of neglect where those that are legally mandated to take care of these children have abandoned their duty and left the children to live on the street, and in some cases intentionally sending them to earn an income for the family.

The study was also interested in knowing what the children did for a living; the findings are as shown in the table below.
Table 1: Source of livelihood for children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Livelihood activity</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Begging</td>
<td>24(28.6%)</td>
<td>22(32.8%)</td>
<td>46(30.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing cars/shop windows</td>
<td>18(21.4%)</td>
<td>9(13.4%)</td>
<td>27(17.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selling Tissue/other items on the streets</td>
<td>11(13.1%)</td>
<td>13(19.4%)</td>
<td>24(15.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working temporarily in shops</td>
<td>14(16.7%)</td>
<td>17(25.4%)</td>
<td>31(20.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting waste for resale</td>
<td>28(33.3%)</td>
<td>10(14.9%)</td>
<td>38(25.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shining shoes</td>
<td>4(4.8%)</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>4(2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying luggage for money</td>
<td>26(31%)</td>
<td>10(14.9%)</td>
<td>36(23.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selling newspapers</td>
<td>5(6%)</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>5(3.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostitution</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>6(9%)</td>
<td>6(4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other source of livelihood</td>
<td>28(35.8%)</td>
<td>28(50.9%)</td>
<td>56(45.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table, there is evidence that the kind of activities that street children engage in for survival were gendered. Those activities that seem to require a lot of physical energy and movement were dominated by the boys, these included washing of cars, scavenging, and carrying luggage, shining shoes and selling newspapers. The girls engaged more in less strenuous activities like begging, petty trading, working temporarily in shops and the risky activity of sex work.

Safety while on the street

Majority of the children did not in most cases feel safe while on the street (35.8%) a bigger proportion of the boys reported this (44%) compared to the girls (25.4%). Almost three out of every ten children reported always feeling safe, it’s however important to note that 4% of all the children reported never feeling safe while on the street. The respondents reported physical assault (70.7%) to be the leading threat to safety while on the street followed by being insulted or bullied (64.3%); the fear of theft and confiscation of personal belongings (55.6%). The other fears mentioned included, being apprehended by the Police/local militia; guards or shop owners; sexual assault; being abducted, fear of rape; and being physically and sexually attacked by street gangs.

Overall, girls reported feeling safer while on the street compared to the boys. In terms of what caused the insecurity, boys felt insecure because of physical assault, bullying, apprehension by guards/shop owners, Police/local militia and abduction. The girls on other hand felt more insecure because of theft and confiscation of personal belongings, fear of sexual assault, rape and attacks by street gangs. The table 2 below presents the impediments to the safety of children while on the street.
Table 2: Safety challenges children experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical assault</td>
<td>70(70.7%)</td>
<td>63(64.3%)</td>
<td>133(70.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being insulted or bullied</td>
<td>63(64.3%)</td>
<td>63(64.3%)</td>
<td>126(64.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft/confiscation of belongings</td>
<td>55(55.6%)</td>
<td>59(55.6%)</td>
<td>114(55.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being apprehended by guards or shop owners</td>
<td>37(37.4%)</td>
<td>31(31.4%)</td>
<td>68(34.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being apprehended by police or local militia</td>
<td>35(35.4%)</td>
<td>32(32.3%)</td>
<td>67(33.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of sexual assault</td>
<td>32(32.3%)</td>
<td>32(32.3%)</td>
<td>64(32.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of being raped</td>
<td>29(29.4%)</td>
<td>29(29.4%)</td>
<td>58(29.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of being abducted</td>
<td>31(31.5%)</td>
<td>31(31.5%)</td>
<td>62(31.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of being physically and sexually attacked by street gangs</td>
<td>20(20.2%)</td>
<td>9(25.7%)</td>
<td>29(25.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STREET CHILDREN AND VIOLENCE

The study investigated three forms of violence experienced by children living and/or working on the street namely; physical, psychological and sexual violence. Each of these categories was assessed. Broadly, psychological and physical violence were the most pronounced types of violence experienced, at (96.03%) and (80.2%), respectively, with sexual violence being the least experienced. Noteworthy, 53.6% of all children had experienced all the three forms of violence, 24.6% experienced physical and psychological while 11% of them experienced sexual and psychological violence. Study findings indicated that sexual violence was closely related to a street child’s sex. For instance there was a significant relationship (P-value =0.000) between being female and experiencing sexual violence, implying that girls were more likely to be sexually abused compared to the boys.

Physical violence

This category of violence was manifested through physical acts like being tied up on a rope or chain; hit with weapons such as stones and sticks; whipping or caning with a belt, stick or other objects; pulling of hair, pinching and twisting arms; beating, punching and kicking. The most pronounced act of physical violence was beating, punching and kicking (63.6%, n=151), followed by pulling of hair, pinching and twisting arms (51%); then whipping or caning with a belt, stick or object. The least reported acts of physical violence were being hit with weapons like stones, sticks or stabbing with knives and being tied up on a rope or chain respectively. More boys than girls reported experiencing acts of physical violence except for pulling of hair pinching and twisting arms. The following table indicates the frequency with which each of the acts of violence was experienced by the respondents.
Majority of the children reporting being beaten and whipped said the violence was severe (37%, 47.9% respectively), while most of those experiencing pulling of hair and being hit with weapons, the violence was mild (47.4% and 45.7% respectively).

**Perpetrators of physical violence**

The findings indicate high levels of child to child violence. For most of the acts of physical violence, male street children were reported as number one perpetrators; on average 63.04% of all the acts were committed by them compared to only 19.4% of their female counterparts. The older male street children were mentioned in relation to grabbing money from the young and weak, beating them up, and threatening to or actually burn their young counterparts, as can be observed in the voices below.

Some old boys who are somehow street boys always come and beat us at night, they always ask for the money we have collected during the day forcefully, they beat us up and grab anything we have. They get sticks and sometimes slap us, box and use razor blades to cut our pockets and remove our small money. (Male 10 years, FGD Moroto)

The owners of the houses allow us to sleep on their verandahs but when big street boys come they chase us and deceive us that it’s there house .they even get match boxes and try to light and burn us when we are deep asleep. (Female 13 years, FGD Kotido)

More than a third (38.4%) of the children reported experiencing physical violence at the hands of passersby or strangers. Other perpetrators mentioned included Police officers where the male officers abused the street children more than female counterparts; the pattern was also similar for
security guards. This implies that one’s age and sex is a risk factor for child to child violence while on the street. A major concern though is when violence is perpetrated by those who are legally responsible for protecting children against abuse—in this case the potential for street children to normalize the acts of violence thus becomes high.

A fifteen year old girl from Kotido talking about the problems that they face on the street noted:

*the main problems we face on the streets are abuses. People like strangers, passersby and security guards around always minimize us here they like abusing us, they shout at us aggressively without us doing anything so this always makes us feel out of place, so we are tortured psychologically.*

FGD participants also reported being subjected to physical abuse, for instance older boys forcefully take money from young street children and physically assault them. A thirteen year old male told of what happens to them:

*Some old boys on the street always come and beat us at night, they forcefully ask for the money we have collected during the day... they beat us up and grab anything we have. They get sticks and sometimes slap us, box and use razor blades to cut our pockets and remove our small money.*

It is also evident from the qualitative data that the children that seek employment as a means of survival are not only abused through heavy loads of work, they are also paid very little money when they get paid; as sixteen year old Veronica from Kotido explained in an FGD:

*Our employers in town always over work us and they pay us little money after doing too much heavy work. They pay us only 500/= shillings which can't sustain us.*

But most significantly some of the employers also met out physical abuse through slapping and children are on regular occasions subjected to sexual abuse as Table 1 indicated.

**Reporting the violence and access to help**

The non reporting or underreporting of violence against street children and especially to authorities like Police is not something new (Meincke, 2011). Children tend to put their trust more in their peers on the street or nongovernmental organizations than law enforcement authorities. They are more likely to get help from the peers who could have suffered a similar ordeal or the civil society organizations that do reach out to these children on the street arena on a daily basis. Of all the children that experienced beating such as punching as a form of violence, only 43.6% told someone
about the assault, 33.3% of those whose hair was pulled did tell while 43.1% of those whipped told someone about it.

The biggest proportion of reporting was by those who were tied up on ropes or chains (52.9%) while the least reported act of physical violence was being hit with objects such as stones, sticks or stabbing (21.4%). There were more boys reporting for pulling of hair and hitting with objects whereas more girls reported whipping and being tied up on ropes/chains. For all the acts of physical violence, children at least reported more to their peers; this was followed by siblings, community members/leaders and then the Police. On average, only about 13% of the reporting of physical violence was to the Police.

The response to the reporting of violence experienced can tell a lot about the potential of the street children to cope with violence. On average 61.8% of the street children that reported the violence were believed, 49.1% said that the person they told tried to help whereas 24.2% did not care and in 17.6% of the cases the victims were blamed for causing the violence against them. It may also be argued that except for extreme conditions of violence, the children may be more interested in redress in terms of medical assistance than actual justice. This may be another cause of just a handful of them reporting to the Police. The negative public image (which may cause negative self-perception) of the children (Ennew 2003) may keep them away from a public institution like the Police.

**Consequences of physical violence and access to medical services**

For all acts of physical violence, most children reported no serious consequences, however, a sizable proportion reported the violence left a scar or mark, while a slightly smaller number were injured and got treatment (see table 3). A few respondents reported inability to work or move as a result. An important observation from the findings is that about 15-29% of all the children that were injured were taken to a doctor or got treated for the injury whereas 6-23% of them did not get any treatment for the injuries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of physical violence</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
<th>Nothing happened</th>
<th>Left a scar/mark on my body</th>
<th>Injured and had to be taken to a doctor or clinic for treatment</th>
<th>Injured but did not get treatment</th>
<th>Was not able to work or move</th>
<th>Went to Police</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beating, punching and kicking (n=96)</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Consequences of Physical Violence
Pulling hair, pinching and twisting arms (n=77)  
|        | 61.04 | 18.18 | 14.9 | 6.49 | 5.19 | 0 |

Whipping or canning with a belt, stick or object (n=73)  
|        | 40.28 | 32.88 | 27 | 23.29 | 10.96 | 2.74 |

Hitting with weapons such as stones, sticks or stabbing with knives (n=35)  
|        | 38.24 | 23.53 | 20 | 20.59 | 2.94 | 2.94 |

Tying up on a rope or chain  
|        | – | – | – | – | – | – |

The physical violence can make the victims not only to internalize it, but also use it against others as a means of self defense against further victimization. A fourteen year old male street child from Gulu, talking about his reaction to violence on the street said:

*I fight back in the same way. Not reacting is like asking for more. If you do not fight back, people turn you into their punching bags. Sometimes you also have to beat others to make you more feared.*

*From using meting out of violence as fight back measure, the children can use it to secure their own positions of domination on the street. This can help them exploit other children in order to partake of other children’s property or resources*

**Psychological violence**

Psychological violence was measured by four broad categories of actions against the street children. These included name calling, saying nasty things, cursing; being screamed at loudly and aggressively; being threatened with harm; and being forced to beg. The most reported act of violence was name calling (85.4% n=151) with a bigger proportion of females suffering this. This was followed by threatening harm which was experienced by 68.9% of the children, with more females experiencing this. The second least reported act was being forced to beg (22.5%) and this was suffered more by the males and similarly a bigger proportion of boys reported being screamed at which was the least experienced act of psychological violence (19.9%).

Most of the children that were screamed at, experienced this 1-3 times in a week (33.3%), name calling was also experienced in similar frequency (32.8%) while threatening harm occurred less frequently i.e. 29.1% of the respondents said it occurred to them once or twice in a month. Most of the children reported being forced to beg 1-3 times a week.

**Perpetrators of psychological violence:** Like the case with physical violence, the male street children were the biggest perpetrators of most acts of violence, 50.5% of all the threatening of violence was by male peers and these were followed by female peers. A similar trend was observed for forcing others to beg. Violence against street children mainly amongst themselves can be viewed in line with competing interests arising from labels/codes notably being categorized as weak, young
and vulnerable on one hand; and strong and dominant on the other. Nightgale and Ojha while reflecting on Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic violence, noted that authority arises from particular cultural codes and the performance of particular subjectivities (2013, pp. 35). Strong in gaining protection against strong peers is an important factor particularly when competing groups seek to maintain dominance through threats of violence. In the process, whether one abides or not, violence will still be experienced.

Passersby/strangers were most responsible for screaming loudly or aggressively at street children (56.7%). In addition, name calling, saying nasty things or cursing was mostly done by strangers (59.7%). Street gang leaders were also mentioned among the perpetrators, alongside the Police officers and security guards.

**Reporting and access to assistance:** Findings show that only 30% of the victims of screaming told someone whereas only 26.4% of those experiencing name calling told someone about it. Being forced to beg is the act of violence for which most victims told someone (57.6%) and a bigger proportion of those telling was female. Girls threatened with harm often told someone.

The majority of the victims of screaming reported to someone in an NGO/CBO (22.2%), for those experiencing name calling, majority told other their peers on the street (36.4%) whereas for threatening harm most victims told a friend (46.7%); children that were forced to beg mostly told a community member or leader about this act of violence. On average less than 10% of all the victims of psychological violence reported the violence to Police officers who are mandated to investigate and hold culprits accountable. Evidence from the qualitative data shows that most victims did not report to relevant authorities because they did not know where to report, the procedure for reporting and those that had previously reported did not get any help.

In some instances the people to whom the children would report were the perpetrators, and the Police perception of these children is sometimes as negative as that of the community. FGD participants for instance cited the Police for arbitrary arrests, confiscating their belongings and branding the street children as thieves, as can be substantiated in the excerpts below;

*Police officers.... They arrest us without cause and charge us money when we are arrested. They strip us naked and some times when they find our colleagues putting on nice shoes or shirts they accuse them of stealing them and take them away for good to their children and relatives; (15 year old boy, FGD Kotido)*

*Last time when the police came to arrest us, they beat us with their guns because we were refusing to follow their instructions, and those police who patrol at night are even
worse, they just beat you even when you have not done anything (15 year old Female, FGD-Soroti).

We lack where to sleep, when policemen come they get us on the street and sometimes they beat us because we sleep on street verandahs (14 year old Bosco, Male FGD-Kotido)

The suffering street children experience at the hands of law enforcement agencies is one of the social problems that have been documented to afflict the street children (Ray et al., 2011; WHO, 2000). It compromises their agency to seek support from statutory services. Indeed children under the circumstances start to identify themselves and this influences their perceived identity (Meincke, 2011).

**Sexual Violence**

Sexual violence was measured by a number of acts against the children on the street. These included being spoken to with sexual intentions; being pinched in a sexual manner, purposeful exposure to another person’s private parts; being forced to look at sexual acts or pornographic material; rape or forced sex; forced consent to marriage; being forced into commercial sex and being trafficked for sexual intentions. Of all the acts of sexual violence the most prevalent were being pinched or touched in a sexual manner with 42.4% of the children reporting this. A bigger proportion of females experienced this violent act. A similar trend was observed for exposure to another person’s private parts. The third most prevalent act was being forced to look at sexual acts/pornographic materials (25.7%) however it was experienced more by the boys. Defilement or forced sex, forced marriage, forced consent to commercial sex were reported in the same proportion i.e. 13.2% of all the children experienced this. The least reported act of sexual violence was being trafficked for commercial sex with 2% reporting to have experienced it.

In terms of frequency, being forced to look at sexual acts or pornographic materials was most experienced with about 28.9% of the children experiencing it 1-3 times in a week. The other acts of sexual violence were experienced either once or twice in a month.

The main perpetrators of sexual violence were the street children and passers-by/strangers. Children who participate in FGDs said passersby sexually insult the girls on the street by touching their breasts.

*People mostly passersby on the streets always like touching our breasts that’s sexually insulting us and there is no where we can report (15 year old female, FGD Kotido)*
The male street children were mostly reported for the purposive exposure of private parts (60.9%); rape/forced sex (55%) and forcing others to look at sexual acts or pornographic material (35.9%). The passersby/strangers were most mentioned for touching or pinching in a sexual manner (65.1%) and approaching or speaking to street children with sexual intentions (50%). The female street children were however, mostly mentioned for forcing others to look at sexual/pornographic material, while street gang leaders were for a significant proportion responsible for rape/forced sex experienced by street children.

Employers of the street children were indicated to actively participate in sexual violence against the street children and in this, no gender is spared, though it seemed that such violence was towards children of the opposite sex to that of the perpetrator. Both boys and girls in FGDs reported suffering the act at the hands of their employers, as is observed in the excerpts below

Sometimes women make us work in their houses and after they force us into sex with them. A woman whom my friend was working for, tried to force him to have sex with her but the boy refused and ran away then later she forged the story that he stole her money. (Male FGD, Moroto)

Some men after making us work in houses after a long run when he gets used to you he forces you to “sex” with you then he gives you more money in order for you not to make and let anybody know that he had sex with you. (16 year old Female, FGD Moroto)

“How some of our bosses use us and tell us that they are going to give us more money after sleeping with them but they do not. And because we fear to lose our jobs we cannot confront them.” (Female FGD, Kotido)

The other perpetrators of sexual violence against street children included street gangs and security agents. The former were reported to engage the children in forced anal sex and even passing o their victims to their other clients for little pay

Some street gang men force us into anal sex or even take us to their clients for the same purpose and give us little money. (Male FGD, Moroto)

Whereas the latter were said to sexually harass the girls, and some even after negotiating to pay for the sex would not do so, which is exploitation in itself.

One of the main problems we face as street girls is sexual harassment. Every man thinks they can use as sexually because we are on our own and we do not have parents to guard us. The situation gets harder in the night with security guards who forcefully
engage us in sexual activities. Some negotiate to give us some money but after the act, when we ask for the money they beat us and go without paying us. (Female FGD, Kitgum)

ACCESS TO (PROTECTIVE) SERVICES

In the foregoing sections we have highlighted the nature of support that children received or were unable to receive in the event that they suffered violence more particularly with regard to whether the children were able to receive assistance from the person that they reported the violence to, or if they received medical assistance and so forth. In the section below, we shed light about other services that children received or were unable to receive while on the street taking into account their survival needs.

As regards shelter, besides the 43% of the children that reported sleeping in an owned or rented house, majority of them did not have a proper place of abode. Many slept on the streets, around places of worship, markets, railway and bust stations and abandoned houses. They mostly used mats, paper or plastic materials without anything to cover them in the night. Such sleeping conditions affected children’s health due to exposure to the cold in the night. A sixteen year old male from Moroto involved in offloading luggage had this to say:

I face the problem of where to sleep because my parents stay very far and because of insecurity in this town when you work up to very late you end up sleeping with your friends on the verandas.

Others pointed to the threat of falling sick:

I face the problem of [falling sick from] diseases like malaria, diarrhea, and cough due to the climatic changes especially when it rains.

When children are victims of violence of whatever category, in some cases they need to get service for the injuries, or attention for the injustice suffered. It was therefore imperative for the study to establish what happened to the children when they experienced acts of violence in relation to access to protective services. For those children who suffered physical violence, 12.8% got injured but they did not receive any treatment. Only 2.7% mentioned reporting to the Police. The implication of these findings could be that many children that would genuinely deserve medical attention did not get it. This could be attributable to the socially constructed stigma towards street children by the community and some service providers; inability to afford service, and ignorance of where to obtain
service. Excerpts from FGD participants are illustrative about community response to and victimization of street children:

Yes I reported of my brothers assault to L.C.1, but the chairperson of the area only chased me away saying ‘he does not listen to thieves may be even your brother stole something, (Female, FGD Kitgum)

There is no response because when we inform or report to them, they only advise us to leave the street which is hard for us because it’s our survival. (Male, FGD Moroto)

Failure to receive meaningful help after reporting to formal authorities meant that children were to report to those institutions only when the consequences were severe:

We do not report violence to authorities … we only tell individuals like our friends or sisters and brothers… but, we can only report violence to any one or authorities when we have got seriously injured and we seek for help or treatment of the injuries. (FGD, girls from Kitgum)

Nonetheless, there are children who received some support from authorities upon receipt of complaints as can be seen in the cases provided below:

There was a time when a certain woman refused to pay me money after me fetching water then she told me she does not having money she wanted to give me food I reported to the L.C of the area then she paid me my money at first she was undermining me (fifteen year old male casual labourer, Kitgum).

Yes me I reported the case of torture and violence where by the man threatened to kill me after me refusing to have sex with him then later the man was summoned to the Police authorities and he was charged and arrested (seventeen year old female, FGD-Moroto)

Illness was reported among children mainly as a result of poor feeding and extreme weather conditions especially during cold nights. Children during FGDs indicated difficulties in getting the required services because of cost, the attitude of service providers and lack of assistance from their peers. Sixteen year old Blandina from kotido said:

We also have a problem of health when we fall sick as no one gives us treatment because drugs are always sold in hospitals, and clinics which we can hardly access
Similar statements were obtained made by participants elsewhere during the FGDs as is put below:

... One day when I was sick I went to healthy centre they asked about what I usually use whenever I get fever then I told him just local herbs and chewing leaves of ‘neem’ trees. These trees are planted by individuals and sometimes if they see you it become a problem (Male, FGD-Moroto). Most of our friends have died due to motor and boda boda accidents, and the outbreak of diseases because of lack of hygiene (Male, FGD-Gulu). We suffer from disease outbreaks like cholera, malaria, cough and flu during rainy seasons and malaria due to many mosquitoes Sometimes you find the health facilities very far from the village and it becomes a challenge for people who get sick in that area. They end up taking local herbs and even over dose which can cause complications to them (17 year old Grace, Female FGD-Moroto). When we fall sick, there is no one to take us to hospital and we cannot afford to go to the clinic because we do not have the money they need for treatment (Fourteen year old Peter, Male FGD-soroti).

All is not always negative for the children though, as one male street child had a positive experience. He said:

One day a man found me vomiting and lying under a tree than he got concern I told him am not feeling well then he took me to hospital and paid the bills.

Accessing emotional and psychological issues was equally difficult as observed by thirteen year old Nancy from Moroto:

Also the problem of stigma and trauma (akurianut ka akiyatong ngina atonodom ka asiomanut) is a challenge to many of u. Many think is a simple thing but if the [child] is not counseled well ... [he is likely to] suffer a complication which can cause illness leading to death. So this is really tormenting young girls seeing grown up people [like us] being traumatized and stigmatized (akurianut ka akiyatotong ngingu atonoon ka asiomanut ani ediaka,tungnan) [as is the case with] HIV infected people.

Emotional problems were further aggravated by children’s inability to have their dreams come true as pointed out by fifteen year old Simon from Moroto:

For me I have my dream that if only a good Samaritan can only sponsor me in school. I would complete up to a certain level get my papers then I contest for MP (Member of
Parliament) and then I see how possible I would help street children and poor people in this region of ours

However, there was an element of frustration as the support needed to realize their dreams was not forthcoming:

*My dream for the future is to be a driver if only one can take me for a driving school. I would be happy but my worry is that there is even up to no one can sympathize on me they will say am a big boy I should be responsible for myself (Male, FGD Kotido)*

*"If only could be given an opportunity, I could go to school and study or join convent to be a sister so that I help my friends in the streets and to encourage them but the challenge and the worry is no one can sponsor to pay my school fees. Even two years back I went to the mission and consulted charity sisters but they told me they don’t sponsor children, their work is only help to those that are most vulnerable, poor, blind etc and those children who have lost their mother at the time of delivery or any related incidents." (13 year old Female, FGD Moroto)*

Most of the children in the post war areas hardly received any services apart from those that are in Lira district which has a civil society organization Child Restoration Outreach (CRO) that provides counseling to cope with the effects of abuse and give them hope. The organization also refers the children to places where they can get help and necessary treatment and further counseling depending on the situation and this is done after assessment. The services are however limited to only this districted in the post war districts.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The presence of children on the street in the region can, albeit not entirely, be attributed to the war and conflicts experienced. Violence among street children can be viewed at wide spectrum; it could be a product of culture, experience of war or copying survival strategy on the street. Whatever the cause, the prevalence of violence is widespread among children, with children themselves being the major perpetrators. Strangers, the community and police and other authorities all are culprits in one way or the other. It is also apparent that access to protective services is severely limited as is the reporting of the cases of violence.

The study recommends a deliberate effort to develop child outreach programs that specifically target the elimination of violence among children and access to protective services. Agencies charged with the responsibility of protecting children need internal
reform including change of conduct as well as attitudes of police officers towards children. To view them as their clients who need support and protection instead of retribution. Most critically, livelihood considerations and access to basic services such as food and medical treatment, education and safe shelter need to be prioritized for children.

Finally, although tackling violence among and against street children requires their removal from the street, it is imperative to have follow up support to monitor the children’s environment, progress with respect to behavior change, and working towards changing the attitudes and behavior of the community towards these children.

REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL PROTECTION, VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND NGOS IN SOUTHERN COUNTRIES

Social protection is now one of the leading items on the agenda of most Southern countries (Gatenio, 2012). It is considered to be an effective means of addressing vulnerabilities from economic, social, natural and other shocks and stresses that the poor, those usually unreach by the official government development interventions and/or those excluded from accessing services are exposed to (Barrientos, 2010; Hickey, 2006). Once targeted towards poor households, social protection interventions can help to reduce poverty by protecting people from falling into poverty or even promoting poverty exits (Barrientos, 2011; Barrientos and Hulme, 2005). It is also said to support broader social and economic outcomes and now considered to be an important ingredient that might help poor countries to achieve wider development aspirations such as the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

While its role in combating poverty is increasingly becoming recognized in the literature there is an emerging consensus that social protection benefits may not fully materialize unless it is tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable groups (Gatenio Gabel, 2012; Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2009). The most prominent variant of such an argument is the call by key development actors to make social protection sensitive to the needs of children (UNICEF, 2009). This child-sensitive social protection (CSSP) approach is based on the evidence that children undergo complex physical, psychological and intellectual development as they grow and experience poverty and vulnerability in a multidimensional and fundamentally different formats compared to adults (Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler, 2012; Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2009; UNICEF, 2009). However, there is currently limited evidence on whether, how, and with what results development agencies in southern countries have experimented with this approach.

This paper aims to fill this research gap through investigating social protection programmes in Uganda – a country where 56% of the population is comprised of children aged below 17 years. Specific focus will be placed on Northern Uganda because of being a post-conflict territory and a
centre of activities for many Nongovernmental Organisations (NGOs) working in the area of social protection. There is a paucity of research on both social protection in post-conflict settings and social protection delivery by NGOs (Gelsdorf et al., 2012). Although several NGOs worked in Northern Uganda during the period of protracted civil war between the ruling NRM government and LRA rebels (between 1986 and 2006), their approach was general and largely reactive with ad hoc interventions for children usually conditioned by the war situation (Ochen et al., 2012). However, since 2007 with the cessation of hostilities in Northern Uganda, this situation has changed – people have returned to their original communities and reconstruction programmes are in earnest. It is therefore timely to investigate the activities of NGOs operating in this part of Uganda to establish the extent to which the policies and existing programs adhere to the principles of CSSP to address the specific vulnerabilities of children affected by conflict.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: the next section discusses the meaning of child-sensitive social protection, its rationale and the role of NGOs there in. The third section discusses the situation of children in Northern Uganda before the fourth explains the methodology employed by the study. Sections five and six present the key findings of the study and the main challenges facing the sector respectively while section seven concludes.

DEFINING CHILD-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

The case for child-sensitive social protection (CSSP) can only be made on the basis of a clear understanding of what social protection entails. Social protection programmes represent one of the key responses for meeting the urgent needs of families and children living in extreme destitution, building a protective environment for children, and addressing vulnerabilities. Social protection involves a set of interventions and measures designed to protect people against socially unacceptable levels of risk and deprivation. For children, therefore, social protection consists of policies that address ‘the inherent social disadvantages, risks and vulnerabilities that they may be born into, as well as those acquired later in childhood,’ and is intended to tackle the underlying

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146 The need for social protection for vulnerable groups of people in conflict affected areas is particularly acute. First, as noted above, conflict creates a range of risks that extends well beyond the economic. Second, conflict situations prevent people from pursuing their normal livelihood and undermine people’s ability to meet their basic needs sustenance. Third, the society against which social security it judged is often in turmoil. For example, communities and families are torn apart. This damage to the social fabric results in generalised ‘social insecurity’, in which social exclusion may take extreme forms.

causes as well symptoms of vulnerability. Drawing on this CSSP is “an evidence-based approach [and] aims to maximize opportunities and developmental outcomes for children by considering different dimensions of children’s well-being” (UNICEF, 2009:2). According to Temin (2008) the range of interventions that need to be strengthened to make social protection child-sensitive include (but are not limited to) cash transfers, social work, early childhood development centres and alternative care.

Yet others have indicated that interventions do not have to target children directly to be child sensitive (Yates et al., 2010). Thus, child-sensitive social protection interventions should cater for both the practical and the strategic needs of children, their carers and the community (Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler, 2012). The former are apparent from the concrete conditions they experience given their stage in life, while children’s strategic needs are observed from an understanding of their limited autonomy and their relative invisibility within the population at large. By and large CSSP involves a set of interventions and measures designed not only to offer ‘protective’ safeguards to vulnerable households by, for instance, buffering a household’s level of income and/or consumption, but also to provide a means of preventing households from resorting to negative coping strategies that are harmful to children (such as pulling them out of school), as well as a way of promoting household productivity, increasing household income and supporting children’s development through investments in their schooling and health, which can help in breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and contribute to growth (Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2009; Sanfilippo et al., 2012).

A caveat regarding the conceptualisation of CSSP is in order. CSSP does not represent a new set of measures or interventions. Instead it acts as a guiding framework or a tool to assess development programmes “against the extent to which they respond to children’s practical and strategic needs” (Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler, 2012:292). Therefore analyses would be in position to establish “the degree of ‘child-sensitivity’ of current social protection measures” in a more organised fashion (ibid). According to Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler (2011; 2012) the degree of child-sensitivity within social protection programmes can be established by investigating how interventions address child specific vulnerabilities which emanate from 1) physical/biological factors, 2) dependence-related vulnerabilities, and 3) institutionalised disadvantages. We return to these dimensions of CSSP later.

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THE CASE FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND CHILD-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

It is argued that approaching social protection with a child-sensitive lens brings numerous benefits not only to children, but also their families, communities and national development as a whole. First, children comprise more than one third of the population in most developing countries – particularly in the poorest – and tend to be over-represented among the poor within countries. It is claimed that “children living in poverty are also more likely to grow up to become poor adults” (Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler, 2012:292). It is therefore expected that child-focused social protection strategies can address the chronic poverty, social exclusion and external shocks that can irreversibly affect children's lifetime capacities and opportunities. A great body of literature suggests that investing in children can help to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty and contribute to growth (Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2009; Sanfilippo et al., 2012).

Secondly, as observed earlier, it is also argued that vulnerabilities are likely to be experienced differently depending on individuals' stage in the life course (infant, child, youth etc.), their social positioning (e.g. gender) and their geographical location (e.g. urban, rural), among other factors (Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2009). Even when whole communities are experiencing a natural or man-made calamity, such as HIV/AIDS and war, children still face peculiar difficulties compared to adults (Ochen et al., 2012; Roelen et al., 2011; Yates et al., 2010). Moreover, by virtue of their age and status in society, children are practically and legally less able to claim their rights without the strong support that social protection strategies can offer (Gatenio Gabel, 2012). Organisations that approach social protection on the basis of children’s ‘innocence’ and dependence on others for the provision of basic needs are largely influenced by rights-based based considerations (Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler, 2011; Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler, 2012).

This means that “failure to invest adequately in the well-being of children from an early age has long-term implications for children and societies, because it increases the likelihood of poverty in adulthood and perpetuates the intergenerational transmission of poverty” (UNICEF, 2009:1). Research points to the existence of strong evidence which indicates that childhood poverty and prolonged stressful experiences can have lifelong effects on children's physical, social, emotional and neurological development (Gatenio Gabel, 2012). Conversely, timely investment in children has economic value. Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler (2012) citing Alderman and Behrman (2006) estimate the economic gain at about $510 for each infant that is moved out of low birth weight status. This is attributed to increased labour productivity and reduction of the costs incurred by infant illness and death. There is also ample research pointing to the link between investing in children, particularly in
critical areas of child protection such as health, education, and early childhood development, and long-term poverty reduction (Zibagwe et al., 2013).

While these claims are appealing, it is not clear how far organisations at the point of implementation have embraced child-sensitive social protection. In this study we focus on Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Uganda as a case study of agencies engaged in social protection activities. Before engaging detailed discussion of NGOs’ performance in Uganda, it is important to give a historical account of NGOs in the field of social protection – an issue that we turn to below.

NGOS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are assumed to play a crucial role in the emergence and operation of social protection programmes in developing countries (Gatenio Gabel, 2012). This is especially due to their strong involvement in advocacy and in social service delivery. In this study we are interested in the service delivery role of NGOs – an aspect that gained prominence at the height of the neoliberal resurgence during the 1980s as an alternative to the retreat of the state as the engine of development in most poor countries (Bukenya and Hickey, 2013). The characteristics of NGOs such as being grassroots-based, harbingers of progressive development agendas like participation, gender and empowerment, and being close to poor people made them particularly well-suited for replacing the much derided state (Lewis and Kanji, 2009; Marcussen, 1996). This development attracted increased direct funding from international donors for NGOs and consequently their numbers soared in most African countries (Therkildsen and Semboja, 1995).

Besides the general observation that NGOs provide critical social services, there is an emerging body of literature depicting NGOs as key direct players in the social protection sector across the developing world. In Fiji, Mohanty (2011) shows that NGOs have a long history of engaging in child protection, providing protection to the needy, assistance for homeless, school fees, scholarships to poor and disadvantaged children and participating in child rehabilitation programmes. In Bangladesh, BRAC’s Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction: Targeting the Ultra Poor (CFPR-TUP) programme, is just one in a country that probably has the highest density of NGOs in the whole world. BRAC started CFPR-TUP as an experiment in 2002, but has now covered 272,000 households in the poorest districts and spends around USD 32 million per annum (Hulme and Moore, 2007). CFPR-TUP focuses on economic development through assets transfer (cows, goats, poultry projects and others) but also includes a monthly subsistence allowance designed to reduce vulnerability and promote entrepreneurship by ensuring a portion of a household basic needs. NGOs
have also prominently featured in Kenya’s social protection programmes including the Hunger Safety Nets Programme (HSNP), funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Korogocho cash transfer initiative run by Concern Worldwide. The former is a pilot project which makes regular cash transfers to 60,000 households in three target groups (older people, households with high dependency ratios and community selected households) for three years to combat food insecurity and poverty in Mandera, Marsabit, Turkana and Wajir districts of northern Kenya (Hurrell et al., 2009). The latter provides regular cash to poor households in urban areas of Nairobi for up to a year following a food emergency precipitated by rising prices and falling incomes, and sought to persuade the Government of the usefulness of a regular cash transfer programme (MacAuslan and Schofield, 2011).

In Uganda several commentators have implicitly indicated that NGOs are key players in the delivery of social protection programmes (Devereux et al., 2002; Gelsdorf et al., 2012; Lwanga-Ntale et al., 2008). The role of Ugandan NGOs in social protection is also implied by the large numbers of both foreign and local NGOs operating in Uganda over the last two decades majority of which being service providers (Barr et al., 2005; Bukenya, 2012). According to estimates, from under 500 NGOs in 1992 (World Bank, 1994:21), the number of NGOs in Uganda skyrocketed to 2,655 in 2000 and to approximately 4,000 in 2003 (Wallace et al., 2004:18). Recent sources put the figure in the region of 10,000 (Grover et al., 2011; NGO Forum, 2011) and the sector is described as “still growing”. However, relying on numbers to infer the role of NGOs here provides limited analytic value because it trivialises social protection to suggest that all service delivery activities are synonymous to social protection. In addition this does not distinguish the categories of social protection or vulnerable groups that Ugandan NGOs focus on.

It is important to note that NGOs do not always have a positive effect on social protection. Ochen and colleagues (2012) illustrate how activities of NGOs tend to undermine the traditional social protection systems by establishing new structures which are even difficult to sustain. More recently as part of the broader move within international development to analyse the political dynamics of development interventions, analysts have called for the need to pay close attention to the politics of NGOs involvement in the social protection sector (Hickey, 2007). One of the emerging issues here is that the direct involvement of NGOs in managing social protection programmes may delay the emergence of long-term and nation-wide state-funded programmes in Southern countries. Where NGOs operate in large numbers, there are fears that government may get reluctant or even resist the introduction of government-sponsored social protection programmes under the pretext that NGOs are already looking after the vulnerable (Hickey, 2007). It is for example noted that NGOs
during the LRA rebellion in Northern Uganda and the period after played the leading role in the provision of relief and re-integration support for families and children affected by war (Walakira, 2009). In reality though NGOs tend to be small in size and therefore unable to mount large-scale social protection programmes that can have impact in the lives of a significant number of vulnerable people (Bebbington, 2004).

Secondly, NGO’s provision of social protection brings to the fore issues around access to social protection as a right for citizens. Some claim that when social protection programmes are funded or run by NGOs, “there is no contract to which these institutions can be held accountable” (Hurrell and MacAuslan, 2012:263). This is not to say that NGO beneficiaries don’t have rights, far from that, it only follows that ‘rights’ in the NGO context are more akin to consumer rights, which are susceptible to cancellation once the programme ends as opposed to citizenship rights that are guaranteed by constitutional provisions (Joshi and Moore, 2000).

Related to the above, there are also claims that NGO-sponsored programmes could have a negative effect on the legitimacy of the state. Hurrell and MacAuslan (2012) have investigated this issue by comparing social protection programmes implemented by the Kenyan government and those implemented by non-state agencies in Kenya. Although no quantitative figures are given to support their claims, the authors reported that where programmes were handled by NGOs “for the most part, these programmes are associated in most people’s minds with external agents such as the British government or NGOs, or the Equity Bank which delivers the [cash] transfers” (2012:266). Meanwhile the orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) cash transfer programme that was implemented by the Kenyan government was allegedly “associated to some extent with the Government, and there is slight evidence for the beginnings of a realisation that the Government could be the provider of resources” (ibid). Basing on such observations, these authors concluded that those accruing credit or symbolic power from these programmes are, therefore, the implementing organisations.

Basing on the analysis in this section, it can easily be noted that the role of NGOs in the field of social protection is not well articulated. Most of the analyses are speculative and are better flagged as questions to be explored empirically rather than being strongly evidenced. We did not find studies documenting the CSSP within NGO programmes. In the following sections we discuss the methodology employed to investigate CSSP within Ugandan NGOs.
METHODOLOGY

This study is based on two rounds of fieldwork conducted in three districts of Northern Uganda, namely Kitgum, Pader and Lira, in 2010 and 2012. Phase one of the fieldwork collected data aimed at gaining insights into the vulnerabilities which children in post-conflict northern Uganda experience. We report the main findings of this phase in Section 4. In the second phase of fieldwork, data was collected from non-state agencies operating in the three districts mentioned to illuminate the nature of social protection and delivery approaches that such agencies employ with respect to vulnerable children. This study was exploratory and descriptive in nature and employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The specific data collection methods included administering a semi-structured survey, in-depth interviews, and interviews with key informants. The study also drew enormously on the review of relevant programme documents and interviews with staff from development agencies implementing social protection programmes in the three districts under consideration. A total of 24 organizations were surveyed. In terms of their size, the average number of paid employees in the different organizations is 10, while the average number of volunteers working with the organizations was four. Only four organization provided information on the estimated annual budgets for their social programmes; ranging between UGX 35,000,000 (USD 14000) and UGX 150,000,000 (USD 60000). The main source of funding for most of the organizations are international development partners such as USAID, Irish aid, DANIDA, and DFID.

THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN NORTHERN UGANDA

Northern Uganda being post-conflict zone it has peculiar challenges. It is well documented that conflicts leave populations displaced, infrastructure and social structures broken down, services interrupted, and value systems eroded. Conflict conditions also devastate household livelihoods, exacerbate poverty and deplete the resources necessary to ensure children's safety, health and development. Conflict and post conflict conditions ultimately erode the capacity of families and communities to take care of vulnerable children. As a result children are deprived of their material and emotional needs, including the structures that give meaning to social and cultural life. Because childhood is characterized by development and dependency, children growing up in conflict affected areas find themselves in very dire circumstances that negatively impact on their current and future lives and livelihoods, affects their chances of survival and full holistic development, impact on

choices and opportunities open to them, and environments devoid of structures that would provide for and protect children. Below we summarise the situation of children in northern Uganda in relation to the three sources of child-specific vulnerabilities identified by Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler (2011; 2012).

**PHYSICAL/BIOLOGICAL VULNERABILITIES**

Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler (2012) argue that children at different ages are more susceptible to the negative impacts of malnutrition or disease by virtue of their immature immune systems and under-development. They also point out that lack of healthcare and low levels of education during infancy and childhood have far-reaching and long-lasting detrimental consequences which affect not only the child as an individual but also society as a whole. In Uganda, the nutrition and health indicators of the North are abysmally poor. It is for instance estimated that 6.5% and 1.9% of the children in this region suffer from moderate and severe malnutrition respectively. Around 15.2% of children below five years go without breakfast in Northern Uganda compared to the national average of 11.8% (UBOS, 2010:106). HIV sero-prevalence in the northern districts stands at 8.3%, far above the national average of 7.3%. Many of the infected are children for as much as 22% of all new HIV infections in Uganda are due to mother-to-child-transmission. While the national averages for under-five and infant mortality rates are 137 and 76 deaths per 1,000 live births respectively, northern Uganda (including Karamoja) has a rate of 177 and 106 respectively, indicating a serious disparity.

The education sector has the worst performance in northern Uganda. The percentage of communities reporting access to a government primary school was 45.6% compared to the national average of 48%; access to pre-primary education centres is 22.4% yet the national average is 53.3% (UBOS, 2010). One may argue that since Uganda operates a free market economy then private providers could be filling the gaps left by government. However this is not the case as for instance only 7.8% communities reported having a private primary school compared to the national average of 38.1% (ibid). The distribution of school teachers, as shown in the picture below, is skewed against the North. Little wonder Pupil teacher ratio in the north is 55 compared to the national average of 48 while Pupil classroom ratio is 76 compared to the national average of 57 (MoE 2011:49).

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151 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) 2006, disaggregated for northern Uganda, which includes Karamoja, *Education Management Information System (EMIS) 2006*
DEPENDENCE-RELATED VULNERABILITIES

Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler (2012) indicate that children are by necessity dependent on adults for their wellbeing. Children are not supposed to be economic agents in their own right and are therefore highly dependent on adult members of the household, family or community for the distribution of resources in order to meet their physical, emotional and social requirements. Indeed, in Uganda parents/caregivers usually play a critical central role in childcare, development and protection. However, for the case of northern Uganda, parents/caregivers’ capacities to play this role has been severely challenged by the extreme social and economic pressures caused by the conflict and displacement (Ministry of Gender, 2009). Government sources indicate that children deprived of parental care is a major concern in Northern Uganda (ibid). The rate of orphanhood is also alarming. Recent studies show that 22% of children in the North are orphaned, which is the highest rate in the country. The highest proportion in Uganda of paternal orphans is also found in the Northern region. Their dependency on adults to support and protect them means children who become orphans are exposed to significant risks, particularly in the context of conflict, humanitarian crises and AIDS (Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2009). It is reported that only six percent Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) in the Northern region have their basic needs met (Ministry of Gender, 2009). As explained below, it is largely due to such gaps that a sizeable number of children have adopted risky behaviors as a coping strategy.

Many vulnerable young people dropped out of school and now live or work on the streets in towns with many earning a living from begging or sex work. Indeed the Northern region has the highest percentages of males (17%) and females (35%) with no education, in comparison to other regions (ranging from 5.1 to 15%). Despite the GoU’s Universal Primary Education policy enacted in 1996, many children in the north do not attend school. According to the 2006 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS), while the national completion rate of primary school is 48 percent, only 20 percent complete primary school in the North. In addition, very few young people in the North who attended primary school are able to enter secondary school. According to UDHS, only five percent of secondary school-age children in the north are in secondary school. There are many factors associated with drop out and non-completion rates for children in northern Uganda. These include the failure of parents to meet additional non-tuition costs associated with schooling such as

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scholastic materials,\textsuperscript{155} hunger and lack of school feeding programmes, pressure on children to work and earn income for the household, and early and forced marriage. Other common causes for school drop outs include distance to school and poor quality of education.

Child protection practitioners also report that the number of children living on the streets has seemingly increased\textsuperscript{156} over the last few years in the North, with concerns that this trend may be on the rise unless adequate support and prevention interventions are implemented. Vulnerable children orphaned or not, often work and most of them fail to attend school, which increases their short and long term-vulnerability. They have difficulties accessing basic services, and are often subject to exploitation. It is for instance reported that children whose parents had died or been killed returned to find their land had been appropriated by relatives, depriving them of a means of support (Ministry of Gender, 2009). Some seek temporary relief from their situation through substance abuse. And young girls are often lured into sex work. Consequently, these children become trapped in a cycle of poverty, violence and abuse. And as they grow, they run an increasing risk of HIV/AIDS and being conflict with the law.

\textbf{INSTITUTIONALISED DISADVANTAGE}

Institutionalised disadvantage also known as ‘cultural devaluation disadvantage’ “refers to the devaluation of certain groups in society based on perceptions of who they are …[and] how those in power act in relation to them” (Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler 2012: 295). Some reports on Northern Uganda have pointed to the fact that children who were associated with fighting forces returned to an environment that made it extremely hard for them to re-integrate into community life and attempt to rebuild a future for themselves (Ministry of Gender, 2009). Taking the example of formerly abducted children who had given birth in captivity (Ochen et al., 2012:92) reported that “society expects the returnee child mothers to take on socially prescribed roles and behavior, even though they have undergone transformative experiences in captivity, which make it difficult to conform to these expectations”. Other studies indicate that prevailing conditions of poverty and limited access to basic services mean that sympathy for returnees, especially those unable to contribute economically, is often not forthcoming (Gelsdorf et al., 2012; Ministry of Gender, 2009).

\textsuperscript{155}While families do not have to pay school fees for their children, they are expected to meet other needs like uniforms, scholastic materials and meals for their children. Many parents however cannot afford these due to rampant poverty

\textsuperscript{156}As an indication, in 2002, in Gulu district no recorded child was living in the streets, whilst in 2008/2009 hundreds of children are estimated to be living in the streets. In Lira town, in 2009, child protection agencies have been supporting over 250 children living on the streets.
This contributes to neglect, impoverishment, and abuse of some returnees. Some returnees who lacked family acceptance and support live in extreme poverty, and some have adopted negative coping strategies such as engaging in criminal activities while other have been forced to take up exploitative forms of labour as a means of survival (Ministry of Gender, 2009). Moreover, as Sabates-Wheeler and colleagues observe (2009:110), “by virtue of their age and ‘minor’ status in society, children are practically and legally less able to claim their rights”.

It is important to note that with the return of peace around 2007, the Uganda government and a number of NGOs have prioritized the reconstruction of the North. Therefore this offers an opportune moment to take stock of the implications of these developments to child sensitive social protection (CSSP) in this part of the country. The next two sections are the focus of this issue.

CHILD SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION WITHIN NGO PROGRAMMES IN NORTHERN UGANDA

NGOs and Physical/biological vulnerabilities social protection

It is argued that access to quality basic social services in post-conflict areas is one of the major issues that impact on children’s well-being, healthy development, and protection. This subsection discusses a range of services provided by different organizations seeking to address the Physical/biological vulnerabilities of children. It is important to note from the outset that some of these interventions targeted children directly while others were indirect – targeting low-income families vulnerable households.

Among the direct services were the nutritional programmes targeting different categories of vulnerable children. Adequate support for child and maternal nutrition is identified as one of the concrete child-sensitive social protection intervention that touches on the well-being of children (UNICEF, 2009) and a critical component for future attainment of nutritional, health and educational status (Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2009). For example Mercy Corps’s nutritional programmes targeted malnourished children under the age of five. The organization works with health centers to identify its beneficiaries. Other organisations such as All Nation Christian Care (ANCC) and Action for Children (AFC) provide nutritional supplements to children under the age of eight years who attend primary schools and selected Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers. Other nutritional programmes targeted children rather indirectly through feeding pregnant mothers (although Sabates-Wheeler (2009) makes the case that there is a positive and robust correlation

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157 ECD are pre-primary Schools
between poor nutritional status in children and low birth-weight which implies that even feeding mothers directly benefit the unborn baby). For instance Mercy cops targeted underweight pregnant mothers in their third trimester. However, the efficacy of such nutritional programmes to bring about physiological improvements that enhance cognitive development by improving iron status and access to other micronutrients among in Northern Uganda has been challenged in some circles (Adelman et al., 2008). In addition most programmes (not only in nutrition but other social protection areas) have been criticised for being overly reliant on donor funding with most of them operating for no more than three years. This makes the sustainability of such activities problematic (Gelsdorf et al., 2012). To make its programmes sustainable, ANCCC initiated a school-based gardening project with support from SNV Netherlands. The programme engages parents and schools to ensure food production with aim of meeting the school feeding needs of children. The organization requires beneficiary schools to have land for agriculture (4 acres). In cases where schools have no land, some parents have stepped in and donated land to schools. At present, only 26 UPE schools are benefitting from this programme.

Another direct social protection intervention falling in the category of biological vulnerabilities is in form of education. In particular, the access, retention and completion of education as well as safe school environments are critical protective factors and empower children to make informed decisions and to articulate and claim their rights in situations of exploitation and abuse, as well as to better identify and avoid risky behaviours or situation (Ministry of Gender, 2009). Several NGOs provided education support to primary and secondary school going children. For example, organizations like Plan International, Acholi Education Initiative (AIE), and World Vision International etc. provide tuition fees, scholastic materials and other requirements for children to attend school. Plan also recruits and pays caregivers in the ECD centers. Such interventions complement government programmes of universal education at primary and secondary school levels by addressing the potential barriers that prevent vulnerable children to take advantage of such policies that were alluded to in the previous section. As a way of maintaining children at school, school feeding programmes intended to provide immediate consumption transfer to children have been implemented by organisations like UN World Food Programme (WFP). WFP supplied assorted food items mainly maize meal, beans and vegetable cooking oil while parents were expected to contribute firewood. Available evidence shows that this programme significantly increased enrolment and attendance rates for children, and reduced dropout rates (Alderman et al., 2010).

Other interventions addressing biological vulnerabilities were in the area of healthcare. There were several organisations providing subsidized social or community health services. These focused on
preventive services particularly in the provision of HIV/AIDS services e.g. provision of antiretroviral therapy and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and malaria prevention. These interventions both directly and indirectly benefited vulnerable children. Noteworthy is that due to the fact that in March 2001 the government of Uganda abolished user fees in public health institutions, few NGOs were engaged in direct health service delivery. This notwithstanding, access to health services remains a challenge to most vulnerable children due to a range of barriers including inadequate staffing at health facilities, distance to facilities, drug stock outs, etc. The rampant outbreak of epidemics, such as the nodding disease in Northern Uganda, has highlighted the inability of government health system to respond timely and adequately to the emergency health needs of the most poverty stricken children living in this region.

Some weaknesses notwithstanding NGO programmes in this area were clearly aiming at realizing one of the key tenets of child-sensitive social protection – intervene as early as possible where children are at risk, in order to prevent irreversible impairment or harm (UNICEF, 2009:2).

**NGOs and dependence-related vulnerabilities social protection**

As noted earlier, in Northern Uganda, the capacity of parents and caregivers to protect children has been severely challenged by the extreme social and economic pressures caused by the conflict and displacement. The years of conflict have reversed traditional gender roles with more women and children taking over responsibilities of management and fending for households. There is widespread absence of work opportunities and this has contributed to idleness and a sense of hopelessness amongst a number of the men. The study observed several activities focusing on increasing caregivers’ access to employment or income generation as a strategy for dealing with child dependence-related vulnerabilities through “mitigating the effects of shocks, exclusion and poverty on families, recognizing that families raising children need support to ensure equal opportunity” (UNICEF, 2009:2).

Among the main activities targeting children directly in this area is the provision of ‘second-chance’ education and vocational training for formerly abducted children and prevention and response to violence in schools. Due to the fact that many children missed out on education opportunities during their prolonged stay in the camps second-chance education initiatives seek to address this. The target group include orphans and other vulnerable children such as formerly abducted children (FAC), former child soldiers, and child mothers among others. For example, Norwegian Refugee Council under their Accelerated learning programme (ALP) targets over-age, out of school children...
especially those who missed out on education due to captivity and encampment, enabling them re-enter the education system and complete primary education. Similarly Plan International Uganda is implementing a catch-up education programme in Lira district for out of school children who are willing and able to re-join primary school education. As pointed out in Table 1 several organisations are implementing vocational training programmes for formerly abducted children, Child mothers and war affected youth as a way of preparing adolescents for their own livelihoods and UNICEF (2009) considers this a key child-sensitive intervention that enables them to acclimatise to their role as current and future workers and parents.

The indirect activities here were in form of livelihood support (including agricultural trainings, support for income generating activities, formation village saving and loans association) targeting low-income families or vulnerable households to build their capacity for meeting the basic needs of children. Such interventions are critical given that up to 64% of the population in Northern Uganda is unable to meet basic needs and the region is considered to be highly stressed, with critical lack of food access and accelerated depletion of livelihood assets (Ministry of Gender, 2009). This situation is explained by the fact that Northern Uganda many adults have grown up in camps thereby making an entire rural generation have limited exposure to farming activities and lack farming skills, both of which are the backbone of rural livelihoods. It is also observed that the majority of the working age population has limited entrepreneurial capacities owing to the confined environment they have been subjected to during the prolonged war period.

Although no attempt was made to investigate the effectiveness of these programmes in a systematic fashion, the study observed that interventions by several NGOs had gaps. Child Restoration Outreach (CRO), for instance, mobilizes children from the street in an effort to provide them with counselling and psycho-social support. Children attend the CRO centre that runs a day programme. When they arrive at the centre in the mornings, the street children are given time to bathe, they share in morning devotion and prayer. They are also given porridge at breakfast and then they attend a programme that entails life skills and discipleship training, they participate in sports, music and drama. At present, however, CRO has no accommodation where these children could stay. Thus, every evening children return to the streets where they find shelter in verandas of shops, video halls, parking lots and other similar places.
NGOS AND THE INSTITUTIONALISED DISADVANTAGE OF CHILDREN IN NORTHERN UGANDA

Responses to the institutionalised disadvantage of children were mainly focused on raising awareness about child rights legislations. Child rights legislations aim to foster equity, reduce children’s vulnerabilities and enhance their overall position in society. Uganda ratified the UN convention on the rights of the Child. Several provisions of the CRC have been domesticated, to provide greater legal protection to children. For example, many domestic legislations have been enacted on key issues where gender inequality and child rights intersect, such as child trafficking, FGM/C and child marriage. Some of the key legislations include the Children Act, Cap 52; the FGM Act, Domestic violence Act, Police Act, Magistrate Courts Act etc. Such legislations can be considered both transformative and child-sensitive. However, the fact that most of the rights violations they seek to address are still rampant demonstrates the fact that they have not yet been fully enforced. Challenges to enforcement include the ineffective child protection systems at the local and sub-national levels. Formal systems at those levels suffer logistical difficulties, inadequate staffing and limited skills and knowledge to handle issues such as investigations, case management, data collection and processing among others.\(^\text{158}\) Thus some NGOs step in to complement government efforts in this area.

In the districts studied several organizations, especially ANPPCAN and Plan international, were involved in advocacy and child-rights sensitization campaigns, as well as other efforts to promote children’s voice and agency. For example, Plan International is currently implementing a programme called promoting rights in African Communities (PRAC). The programme involves community sensitization about issues of land rights, domestic violence and child rights.

Several other organizations such ANPPCAN, Concerned Parents’ Association (CPA) and Child Restoration Outreach (CRO) are involved in the provision of child protective services such as psychosocial support for survivors of sexual and gender based violence, withdrawal and rehabilitation of street children, prevention and response to of violence in schools and legal aid for survivors of violence.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that social protection programmes of NGOs in Northern Uganda are fairly child sensitive. These findings are summarised in Table 1. The rows depict the

three dimensions of CSSP while the columns reflect whether social protection directly or indirectly benefited children.

Table 1: NGOs and child-sensitive social protection in Northern Uganda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biological</th>
<th>Direct/practical needs</th>
<th>Indirect/strategic needs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health and Nutrition for children under five years and/or school feeding support (Mercy corps, All Nation Christian Care (ANCC), UN World Food Programme, and Action for Children (AFC))</td>
<td>Health and Nutrition for lactating mothers (Mercy corps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psycho-social support for traumatized children (Association of Volunteer Services International (AVSI))</td>
<td>Teacher training for early childhood development (Acholi Education Initiative (AEI))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education through provision for stipends for children, learning kits, mats, corner play games, cement and iron sheets for the ECD centers (Plan International, Kitgum Concerned Women’s Association (KICWA), DANIDA, War Child Canada, Children of the World (COW)-Foundation, and Action for Children).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Dependence | Withdrawal and rehabilitation of street children (Child Restoration Outreach (CRO)) | Empowering women to engage in income generating activities through the provision of a small start-up grant e.g. through provision of agricultural inputs (Care international, NRC, CPA, DongPaco women program, and AFC) |
|------------| Provision of vocational training for formerly abducted children, Child mothers and war affected youth (Plan, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), AEI, Live again, Avis, Children of Peace Uganda) | Voucher and cash transfer to vulnerable families (AVIS and Mercy corps) |
|            | Prevention and response to violence in schools (ANPPCAN) | |

| Institutional | Psychosocial support for survivors of sexual and gender based violence (Concerned Parents’ Association (CPA)) | Child abuse prevention and response including legal aid support i.e. Provide pro bono (free) legal support to poor and marginalized groups (ANPPCAN, Northern Uganda Legal Aid Bureau (NULAB), and Kiwepi) |

Source: Authors’ compilation
A close look at NGO social protection programmes reveals that they were in line Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler three dimensional child sensitive framework. However several limitations and challenges were identified and we briefly elaborate on these below.

**CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING SP PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN**

Our observations point to the following limitations and gaps in the current Social Protection Interventions in Northern Uganda.

*Limited scope and reach of social protection interventions:* The scope of many of programmes is extremely limited and/or small, and coverage is low. As noted in Table 1, most programmes use a single instruments rather that a mix of interventions to address the multiple deprivations faced by children. Low coverage is a result of a combination of constraints, including, financial and capacity limitations. The limited scope and coverage limits the effectiveness of the different social protection initiatives, especially in the context of wide-spread and multiple vulnerabilities occasioned by conflict.

*Fragmentation of provision:* Although this study identified several social protection programmes targeting various vulnerable children, many of these programmes are fragmented without a coherent social protection strategy which articulates and fosters synergies across programmes. There is also lack of coordination between different programmes and actors, with programmes sometimes targeting overlapping vulnerable groups of children. Fragmentation of programmes undermines their effectiveness, by splitting funding between different organisations.

*Ability to address deprivations children face:* Most of the programmes do not address the multiple deprivations facing children in a comprehensive manner. It is common knowledge that children in conflict affected areas are exposed to multiple vulnerabilities. This casts doubt on the ability of NGO interventions in Northern Uganda to quality as child-sensitive since such a status is best achieved through integrated social protection approaches (Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2009; UNICEF, 2009). Moreover, although several organizations claimed to support Orphans and Vulnerable children, some of the services provided are generic and do not adequately support some categories of vulnerable children who may require specialist support especially disabled children, HIV/AIDS affected children and children affected by trauma emanating from extended periods violence. In addition only a few programmes provide services for children with special needs. It was also
highlighted that specific social protection interventions may be required for children born in captivity who continually suffer community exclusion.

**Weak Institutional Capacity:** Most organizations lack the capacity to deliver child-sensitive social protection programmes. The institutional capacity to deliver social protection programmes in most organizations is hampered by inadequate human resources, and limited structural capacity in some contexts. Extending child-sensitive social protection will require an increase in the institutional capacity, both to deliver programmes and address the barriers to children's uptake of social protective services. This would require investments in management information and monitoring and evaluation systems and the training, recruitment and motivation of social workers and other necessary staff.

**Funding:** One of the major limitations highlighted by a majority of organizations was limited funding. Many programmes of particular benefit to children are vulnerable to financial shortfalls as they are principally donor funded. It is also due to funding constraints that few vulnerable children are reached by the current interventions.

**Sustainability of social protection programmes:** The sustainability of most of the social protection programmes is also doubtful. Most of the social protection programmes investigated were donor-funded projects which are short-term by nature. This finding has been echoed elsewhere (Gelsdorf et al., 2012; Ochen et al., 2012). Other programmes such as the WFP nutrition programme have been criticised for being narrowly focused on meeting the immediate or short-term needs of the population rather than building the capacity of the beneficiaries for the long-term (Ochen et al., 2012).

**Infrastructure related challenges:** This study also reveals that infrastructure poses a major challenge for organizations to reach vulnerable communities. It was reported that some target communities are in areas with no basic infrastructure in place specifically roads and bridges. In some cases, small access roads exist but are impassable during the rainy season. Similarly, poor infrastructure hinders small holder farmers to access markets for their produce thereby undermining the success of social protection programmes in this area.

**CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD**

From the foregoing discussion all the ingredients of child-sensitive social protection defined in terms of response to biological/physical vulnerabilities, dependence vulnerabilities and institutionalised
disadvantage were discernible in programmes of NGOs operating in Northern Uganda. However, we have also identified glaring gaps in these interventions that require urgent attention. Based on the findings presented the following recommendations are presented in relation to how NGOs can contribute to strengthening child-sensitive social protection in the region.

Repackage of social protection instruments: Decisions about what types of social protection instruments to invest in should be informed by a systematic vulnerability assessment. This should establish the main vulnerabilities children and their families face, as well as the political, institutional, fiscal and socio-cultural factors likely to facilitate or constrain the introduction of particular mechanisms. While cash transfers are an increasingly popular social protection modality, it is important that other instruments are considered as part of a broader package to tackle the ‘multi-dimensional’ vulnerabilities many children in the northern region face. These include social health insurance and subsidized services.

Improve programme design and monitoring and evaluation: As experience is gained and programmes scaled up, it will be essential to ensure maximum efficiency and equity, so that scarce resources are used to best benefit those who are most in need. Institutionalizing robust monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms will be critical. This includes investment in baseline surveys and lesson learning from pilot programmes, in order to facilitate timely programme adjustments, and to generate and disseminate evidence of programme impacts so as to garner the broad political support required to take programmes to scale. In all this NGOs must ensure that children at the centre of these activities.

Strengthen inter-agency coordination: Cross-agency coordination will be vital to ensure complementarily of services and tackle the multi-dimensional vulnerabilities that many children face in the region. Effective linkages between programmes are critical. The mapping identified chaos in interagency coordination, with different agencies doing relevant work on a specific areas if social protection with limited knowledge of what others are doing and a dearth of strategy to promote interagency coordination.

Considering the multidimensionality of child vulnerability, social protection should be more systematically designed to foster synergies and complementarities with basic social services and child protection. This includes, for example, linking nutritional support programmes with health checks for young children.
REFERENCES


ABSTRACT

While the objectives and activities of reintegration programmes spanning diverse groups of children are often similar, to date there has been limited effort to pool experiences and learning, especially between agencies working in humanitarian and development settings. This paper draws on existing literature and in-depth interviews with practitioners to identify relevant learning for those working in war-affected communities, joint principles for good practice and research gaps. It examines:

- Definitions
- Promising practice in different stages of reintegration
- Children’s participation
- Role and mandate of different actors
- Measurement and research methodology

Whilst war-affected children have some unique needs, the findings show numerous areas where their experiences overlap with other separated children, and that child protection systems in fragile states must be designed to move into, out of and through emergency measures for children, thus ensuring their continuous protection and ability to engage in decisions that affect them.

Key words: Cross-over learning; research gaps; broad child protection

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INTRODUCTION

Family reunification and community reintegration are objectives frequently pursued for separated children\textsuperscript{160} - boys and girls who may have been separated by conflict or disaster, have migrated or been trafficked for work/sexual exploitation, be living on the streets or in foster or residential care, associated with armed forces or groups, or even detained in juvenile facilities. Some of them are also living with HIV and/ or have disabilities, many of them are young, and substantial numbers experienced violence either prior to departure or during their time away. While the objectives and activities of reintegration programmes spanning these diverse groups of children are often similar, to date there has been limited effort to pool experiences and learning. This is despite many child protection practitioners identifying documented examples of good practice in reintegration as a key gap in knowledge.\textsuperscript{161}

Child protection actors working in war-affected communities are understandably engrossed in the dynamics of the particular emergency and have little time and resources to ‘lift their heads’ and learn from other contexts, specifically non-conflict settings with similar access to – or lack of - financial and human resources. And yet, as this research shows, practitioners in both settings face many similar challenges and opportunities. This paper specifically identifies useful approaches to reintegration from which child protection in emergency (CPiE) staff can learn, as well as opportunities for joint research to address common concerns. That said, it should also be noted that there are several contributions that the emergency sector can make to broader reintegration (i.e. the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, coordination).

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

Almost 200 organizational reports and academic documents were compiled and included for a preliminary assessment; 81 were selected for in-depth review. The criteria for selection were: i) relating to low or lower-middle income countries (as defined by the World Bank); ii) with a significant focus on children, iii) useful to achieve a balance across the globe, populations (i.e. living on the streets or refugees) and program settings (i.e. in emergency and development settings); and iv) demonstrating solid practice.

In addition, 20 interviews were conducted with key informants to incorporate personal and professional views on children’s reintegration from a range of contexts and to explore under-}

\textsuperscript{160} Defined as children who are “separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives” (Interagency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2004).

\textsuperscript{161} This gap has been identified by Family for Every Child members in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America.
documented issues. A third data collection component was an on-line questionnaire, which was circulated to English-speaking field-level managers of child protection programs; 31 people responded.

All three components were analysed in relation to current learning on children’s reintegration; for this paper, those findings were then reviewed to determine approaches which practitioners in war-affected settings could adopt or adapt, and gaps in knowledge that could be jointly addressed.

The main limitation of the study was that only documents in English, French and Spanish were reviewed. This inevitably means that some enlightening material and informants were omitted, particularly from parts of Asia and the Middle East. Despite much effort to gather materials from Latin America, it proved difficult to access Spanish materials and colleagues and impossible to draw from Portuguese sources. In addition, the research neither interviewed children to gain their perspectives nor found substantial documentation of their voices in the literature,\(^\text{162}\) which is problematic given the importance of boys and girls’ agency throughout the reintegration process.

Based on the research conducted, the paper briefly examines children’s right to reintegration and the lack of a common understanding of that term. Then, using the results of the analysis, it focuses on practices emerging in the development context from which child protection in emergencies (CPiE) workers can learn. Finally, the conclusion suggests areas for further research by development and emergency practitioners.

THE BASIS FOR AND DEFINITION OF REINTEGRATION

Rights, global guidance and reintegration

The right of each child who has been separated from his or her family or usual caregiver to be protected and supported in returning to the care of that family is laid out in Art. 39 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.\(^\text{163}\) While the state is the ultimate duty-bearer in this regard, the responsibility to protect children and promote their reintegration falls on everyone in society.

\(^{162}\) One important exception is Save the Children’s 2005 report *No Place like Home*?

\(^{163}\) It stipulates that member states shall “…take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child”.

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In 2009, the United Nations welcomed the *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* (hereon referred to as ‘the Guidelines’), which established the primary goal of support for separated children to be the return to the biological family or family of origin. Where this is not possible, the child should be placed with a permanent family, according to the national and cultural protocols around adoption. CPiE workers use additional guiding documents such as the *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, the *Paris Principles and Commitments*, and the *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Separated and Unaccompanied Children*. Broadly speaking, child protection actors program for separated children – living in any context - on the premise of “the child within the family; the family within the community” though, as shall be discussed, there are exceptional cases.

**Achieving a common definition of reintegration**

The term ‘reintegration’ lacks a clear, global definition, which has caused widespread discrepancy both in the literature and in practice about what it entails and how it can be achieved (Wedge, forthcoming). This can have important consequences when for example, reintegration becomes simply a euphemism for non-recidivism in the case of former young offenders and non-re-recruitment for children formerly associated with armed groups and armed forces. The data does indicate increasing clarity to re-conceptualise reintegration as a far more nuanced and complex process than a single event, occurring in stages over time, and stretching far beyond the reunion of the child and immediate family (Wedge, forthcoming).

The ‘family’ is a core concept in child protection. In fact, the Guidelines indicate that reintegration exists only with the return of a child to the biological parents or family of origin (i.e. extended family members or ‘usual’ caregiver). However, this research highlights that a high proportion of actors consider a broader range of placements as successful end points of reintegration²⁶⁴ that better reflect the children’s different circumstances and realities; these include long-term foster-care (including some interpretations of *kafalah*, the Islamic practice of family care), supporting an older child to live independently, and domestic adoption.

Thus, this paper proposes the following definition of reintegration: the process of a separated child making the transition back to his or her immediate or extended family and / or the community (usually of origin), in order to find a sense of belonging and purpose in all spheres of life.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ In the absence of a standard definition and wishing to generate the widest perspective on the topic, the literature review used the following: The process of a child without parental care making the transition back to his or her own parent(s) and community of origin, or where this is not possible, to another family who can offer care which is intended to be permanent (Wedge, 2011) though not through formalised adoption. Key informants were asked to define the term, which was usually personal and not institutionalised.

²⁶⁵ By excluding adoption and placement into long-term foster care, this definition neither aims to diminish the value of either of these two options for some children, nor dismiss the idea that returning to
This definition highlights three important issues. The first is that a significant proportion of (adolescent) girls and boys who were associated with armed group and armed fighters, as well as those living on the streets, prefer to move into independent living in a community setting, and not with family. While this can be a form of alternative care, in these cases it is widely used as a final placement, ‘skilling up’ older adolescents for their emerging adult roles.

The second issue is that a return to life in one’s family is not the ultimate goal of reintegration; while there are no common indicators of “successful” reintegration, it certainly extends beyond a living arrangement with one’s parents and siblings. By mentioning the pursuit of a sense of belonging and purpose, as well as the family unit, the emphasis is on the fact there needs to be on-going social and economic policies to support vulnerable children and families and not just use the latter as a dumping ground (i.e. to close institutions or empty transit centres).

Finally, the proposed definition envisages a process, which can be completely self-driven or assisted by various externally-guided efforts, such as a preparatory phase, reunification with family and community, and follow-up support. Informal or self-directed reintegration is particularly common amongst children associated with armed forces and armed groups, and must be included to acknowledge their reality, as well as their agency over their lives.

ROLE OF DIFFERENT ACTORS IN THE REINTEGRATION PROCESS

While the research did not reveal any marked difference between the roles of the various actors (i.e. parents, child protection workers, teachers, local authorities, village chiefs, etc.) in humanitarian versus development settings, there was an interesting discussion on the variation in the mandate and accountability of agencies. In low resource settings (particularly disaster and conflict-affected ones), the political will and / or capacity to protect children tends be weak; thus, NGOs and UN agencies step up to strengthen national child protection systems, preferably with specific supports but also through direct service provision (Barnett & Wedge, 2010).

families and communities of origin may not be in the best interest of the child, and that in some cases, periods in alternative care or adoption may be the most appropriate choices for children. However, in line with the Guidelines, it acknowledges that these processes of placement into new families or alternative care are qualitatively different from the process of reintegrating children back into their own families, requiring different forms of support for children and care-givers.
Where direct service is provided to separated children, the issue of mandate for these international and national humanitarian responders is a complex one. In situations of armed conflict, UNHCR and ICRC are clear about their mandate to intervene in individual cases, with the former having a well-known “Best Interest Determination” process. While a humanitarian agency is likely registered with the relevant authority, it may find that its individual case management mandate is less clear. The interviews for this research point to development actors having more thorough direct service provider agreements, which should be considered by the CPiE sector. This dialogue could also inform any campaign to regulate private orphanages during an emergency and afterwards, as under the Guidelines they are obliged to register themselves, have written procedures, and receive State oversight.

**EMERGING PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE**

The analysis of the data on children's reintegration points to a number of emerging practices, as well as knowledge gaps. Those gaps are summarized at the end of the report. The following section examines how pre-reunification efforts can shape the on-going reintegration experience, a number of important areas of learning for post-reunification support, some cross-cutting issues, and management issues.

*Registration and tracing processes*

While it is outside the scope of this paper to look at registration and tracing processes for separated children in either context, there is one aspect that deserves some attention, as it under-considered and yet can have a significant influence on the reintegration process. It is the idea that registering a separated child and confirming facts about his or her name and family background can in itself be an identity-shaping process. This may take the form of the misspelling of a child's name, which is perpetuated through years of documentation, or something more keenly felt, such as learning that you are a big brother, you come from a minority group or you are now head of household.

The international NGO Hope and Homes honours the life-transformation innate in a child preparing to leave a residential facility by explaining the tracing and reintegration process and then doing exercises to build awareness with the child of who he or she is, what family exists, and what being part of a family means (interview with D. Pop). This is an important period of transition where children may be learning about who they were, articulating who they now are, and thus, inevitably shaping who they will be. Unfortunately, there is very limited longitudinal research to inform our interventions.

Whatever the context, this period of self-awareness deserves great respect and careful attention from workers, and should be situated within a holistic approach to assisting the child move toward
reintegration. The anti-trafficking network Home: Child Recovery and Reintegration argues for holistic intervention from the outset, identifying nine foci, such as household economic security, self-esteem, housing, and spiritual, cultural and religious connection.

In sum, humanitarian actors would do well to engage in discussion and research with development colleagues about how to assist a child through this sensitive, identity-forming phase.

**Transit Centres**

Transit centres are used in both conflict and non-conflict contexts, particularly for children who have been trafficked, lived on the streets, and/or been associated with armed fighters. The latter two populations share a number of traits (generally, a strong sense of independence, anger management issues, abuse/ addiction to drugs or alcohol, etc.), and thus tend to receive quite similar interventions: detoxification, personal health and hygiene knowledge, vocational training, etc.

It is important to consider the quality of care that children receive in these centres, as it sets the stage for the reintegration process. Managers may be able to learn from each other on issues of staff and child safety, selection of sites close to receiving communities, facilitating flexibility within site management (such as creative models for bridging larger distances and moving location if numbers warrant), ensuring quality of care and strong but appropriate bonding with caregivers, and transitioning longer-term cases to foster families (for example, when tracing proves difficult or cross-border formalities are complex).

There has been widespread debate about the use of transit centres, the optimal length of time a child would remain a resident and the level of services that should be provided. One perspective is that children can become ‘institutionalised’ and face greater difficulties when they transition to community living (LeGrand, 1999; Simcox & Marshall, 2011), while others argue for some children’s need for relatively long-term and intense programmes of support and stability in order to be equipped for independent living (Jareg, 2005; interview with P. Mohanto). The research appears to validate the concern that agencies can rely on the transit centre model after its usefulness has lapsed, perhaps owing to the level of investment it takes to launch a centre, let alone efforts to ensure quality service delivery. Preliminary research working with the same population group within the same country is showing markedly different approaches to the length of time that children remain in the centres, and the types and quality of services they reportedly need (interview with S. Miles). There is clearly great opportunity to work more closely with development colleagues to increase understanding of which children need what sorts of residential or drop-in interventions.
Psycho-social supports

There are many similarities in the psychological and social issues that separated children may be experiencing. There is also a shared gap in availability of psycho-social supports for children in low and lower-middle income countries, whether war-affected or not. Thus, there are many reasons for humanitarian staff to learn from the research, experiences and training of other colleagues, particularly those working with children living on the streets or coming from gangs.

For example, over the course of separation, children form new emotional attachments: to staff and volunteers, their peers, foster families, etc. Several reports indicate how important it is for children to be allowed to express their full range of emotions during the reunification period, as this may be key in helping them transition back to their families and communities of origin, and confirms the trust-worthiness of the adults around them (Family for Every Child & Partnership for Every Child, 2013; E. Garcia Rolland, personal communication, August 14, 2013).

Humanitarian actors must know the pre-existing resources and models of psycho-social support, in order to be able to ascertain which – if any – can be expanded quickly in case of emergency, and to be able to play a quality role in the continuum of care that children deserve over a multi-year reintegration process. And finally, managers in both settings face a dearth of well-trained personnel (see section below) and need to work together to address this gap.

Focus on family strengthening

Despite UNHCR and others’ “Best Interest Determination” processes, the literature review and interviews point to what may be a slight bias amongst humanitarian programmes to assume that children should head back to their families. It is difficult to know if this is indeed the case and if so, why workers do not explore root causes of separation as deeply as their development colleagues; it may be simply an issue of time or perhaps it is the tools used and related training.

There is a growing trend to use a strengths-based approach to assess the social and economic situation of the families of separated children (Wedge, forthcoming; E. Garcia Rolland, personal communication August 8, 2013). When used to examine family dynamics, this methodology helps the various relatives articulate what they are contributing to their child’s development, and appears to improve the relationship between them and the worker (interviews with S. Miles, D. Pop & C. Cabral). Some development colleagues are also turning to collaborative resource mapping, whereby a family completes an exercise to identify its existing and potential financial and material resources.
Families report being pleasantly surprised by the array of resources they can access and feel empowered to use them more effectively (interview with D. Pop).

While a few humanitarian agencies have already adopted a family-centred approach to social and financial assessment, it seems a wider dialogue with development colleagues could prove fruitful to draw out lessons, tools and their applicability. In addition, all reintegration actors interviewed for this research spoke of family mediation around roles, expectations and behavioural challenges, thus pointing to another area where joint learning and research is possible.

Post-reunification support

The data indicates that amongst some actors there continues to be a lack of recognition of the importance of follow-up for returning children, instead allowing for case closure as soon as the child arrives home. This may be due to lack of resources, awareness or the fact that it is complex work.

In fact, virtually all the managers surveyed for this report clearly struggle with the frequency, longevity and quality of the support they offer children post-reunification. International guidance, such as the Guidelines and the Paris Principles acknowledge that long-term support is optimum (3-5 years in the case of the latter), though prioritization is needed. The longest service delivery model surveyed was of the Mexican NGO, Junto con los Ninos y las Ninas (JUCONI), which works with entrenched street children and provides support for up to a decade, or even a life time (JUCONI, 2012).

However, a number of common obstacles make that sort of commitment rare: funding constraints, staff turnover, workers’ unease about their role and lack of resources, new strategic vision / end of ‘emergency phase’ within a weak child protection system, and for some, physical insecurity. Instead, child protection workers speak with regret of pre-emptive case closure and / or resource commitments to children that ultimately cannot be met (Jareg, 2005); indeed, respondents to the on-line survey stated financial constraints as the second biggest obstacle to successful reintegration.166 As with the campaign to ensure that children’s protection is embedded in the post-2015 (Millennium Development Goals) action plan, it may bear fruit to join with development colleagues in a target country to articulate the obstacles outlined above, brainstorm some solutions, and advocate for children’s rights to reintegration. Specifically, agencies working on the demobilization of the ‘hardened core’ of child fighters might wish to look to the resources and approaches of JUCONI and its Safe Families, Safe Children network.

166 The first was family conflict.
Key informants indicate a shared concern by staff for the safety of formerly trafficked children and former child soldiers after their re-unification. While settings vary greatly, there may be some room for joint learning about approaches to working with communities and security forces to improve returnees’ perceived and actual safety, as well as helping children, in particular adolescents, negotiate these fraught living conditions.

Another issue where a certain amount of ‘cross-over’ occurs is the support given to teachers of children with behavioural difficulties. Separated children are often anxious about reintegrating into the local school, either because they have been following a different curriculum (i.e. institutionalised and refugee children) or because of being labelled as troublemakers or stupid (Family for Every Child & Partnership for Every Child, 2013). Thus, reintegration interventions in both settings often prioritise working with schools and individual teachers to create inclusive programs that ultimately benefit all children demonstrating similar behaviour.

When a refugee repatriation or a demobilisation programme is underway and many separated children will be returning home, humanitarian workers could learn from how other settings proactively tackled social concerns within the education sector. For example, the education authorities in Moldova hired liaison officers in schools where there were a high number of de-institutionalised children settling back into community life (Family for Every Child and Partnership for Every Child, 2013).

One final issue is the use of communications technology in bridging the distances and human resource gaps. In particular, there seems to be much potential in both an emergency setting and large catchment areas to use mobile phones to monitor children’s well-being in the reintegration process. In addition, national child helplines – such as the ones in Rwanda or Haiti - are increasingly filling a gap in the formal child protection system by monitoring children’s concerns in schools, communities and families, as well as making case referrals; “in countries where the child protection system is porous, child helplines can also step up and provide direct interventions, shelter, mediation and rehabilitation services to children and young people reaching out for help” (Bazan, 2011, p. 5).

However, across the board, there has not been much learning to date. Thus, dialogue and research is required to see how pre-existing helplines can be maximized as humanitarian tools during emergencies or how to implement lessons learned in the creation of new ones when disaster strikes. Mobile phone companies have been receptive to partnering with child protection actors, and may be ambassadors to the wider private sector.
Economic-strengthening

All key informants and much of the literature state the importance of household economics in a child’s reintegration and acknowledge that the child protection sector has under-performed in assessment and effective assistance. However, improvements are being made, such as a greater focus on the household, as opposed to the child, and establishing partnerships with specialist agencies while retaining a case management role.

There is increasing evidence that carefully crafted cash transfer programs direct to vulnerable households assist in the protection of children (Chaffin, Rhoads & Carmichael, 2013; Skoufias & Parker, 2001). CPiE practitioners should seize on this knowledge and test it robustly in a wide array of settings where children are reintegrating. In addition, it appears that those same workers may be missing a piece of their training, as very few of them know about pre-existing or current social protection initiatives that may assist their caseload to reintegrate (Wedge, forthcoming).

Finally, this research indicates that during the early stages of an armed conflict or other emergencies, managers may gain important insights into appropriate reintegration strategies by reviewing current or pre-existing data on the household of origin/return of street-living and other vulnerable children, as well as examining any current or pre-existing reintegration kits and vocational training initiatives. In addition, experiences and learning could be shared about presenting viable vocational options to adolescents who want to learn a particular trade deemed unsustainable by robust market analysis.

Human resources

An obvious but under-valued reality is that reintegration programs in both settings draw from the same relatively limited pool of people. Hiring trained social services professionals is relatively unusual; more frequently, especially in war-affected programmes, managers identify people with the “right” attitude towards separated children and their families and then carry out on-the-job training. These workers then return to the general workforce when an emergency winds down. Thus, the question is how can CPiE managers play an effective role in the overall social services workforce development?

A related issue is the use of community members as volunteers in formalized child protection systems (i.e. a committee that oversees reintegration, works on the prevention of separation, refers cases of child abuse). In humanitarian settings, this can place an untenable burden on communities

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167 John Parry-Williams’ social workforce research in Malawi documented an average of three professional social workers per district (cited in Delap, 2011).
at an extremely difficult time. There may be learning from the development sector on the use of volunteers generally and the level of appropriate support that is needed (S. Uppard, personal communication, August 19, 2013).

**Informal and self-directed reintegration**

Managers usually have little knowledge of the scale and issues of the informal or self-directed cases of reintegration. While anecdotal evidence indicates that many of these individuals fare well, a certain number come to the attention of agencies when social or economic problems emerge, particularly after a post-reunification ‘honeymoon period’. The data seem to indicate that this cohort of children is more prevalent during or after an emergency (Wedge, forthcoming), though it must also affect a number of street children and those returning from detention facilities. No specific research has indicated whether this is because the local child protection system is better resourced to identify cases during an emergency or because a higher proportion of children opt for that route home. CPiE managers might want to include discussion of this phenomenon with long-serving national staff and / or government colleagues, in order to understand how this invisible caseload was assisted prior to the emergency.

**Linking to prevention of separation efforts**

Good practice suggests that efforts to prevent separation should be integrated within reintegration programs (Ray, Davey & Nolan, 2011). Initiatives typically aim to prevent the re-separation of a returned child, though may have a secondary (or even unarticulated) aim of preventing new cases within the family and community. Measures range widely, including poverty reduction strategies, efforts to reduce stigmatisation, or the promotion of social policies that empower families to care for their children at home.

The programs working to reduce the number of children being admitted into residential facilities and their length of stay provide a good example. In Russia and Moldova, EveryChild worked with families at risk of losing their ‘parental rights’ to find a solution and prevent unneeded placement. Working on the same parental [and community] skill sets needed for reintegration, they were successful in promoting parental care (Delap, 2011). In fact, many key informants spoke at length of the secondary function of family counselling being to assess the problems of other children in the house.

While some approaches to family-based interventions require a high level of individual casework and may be best suited to children with complex needs and / or a history of violence, other approaches
engage the wider community. The international NGO Hope and Homes has created a series of community hubs, specifically positioning them where the documented level of separated children reintegrating (amongst other indicators of social ills) is elevated.

Without a sound child protection framework within which to operate, agencies face an uphill battle in providing effective long-term support for reintegrating children (Ray et al, 2011). In places such as Brazil and Sierra Leone, they have come together to address the prevention of first time separation, as they grew tired of reactive reintegration work (Cantwell, Davidson, Elsley, Milligan & Quinn, 2012).

In sum, in both war-affected and development settings, there is limited focus on prevention of separation. Clearly, more strenuous prevention activities are needed, but in reality, funding is simply not there (Asquith & Turner, 2008). Child protection managers confirm that programs which can report exactly how many children were housed in a shelter and subsequently ‘reintegrated’ are more successful in securing donor funds than prevention programs with hard to quantify objective measures of success involving advocacy for policy change, community sensitization and awareness raising. Once again, joint efforts are needed to address this common perception of the child protection sector and separation issues in particular.

**Other emerging principles of practice**

Targeting assistance is a constant dilemma for child protection actors who are regularly faced with many violations of girls and boys’ rights (Chaffin et al, 2013). It is clear that reintegration programmes in war-affected communities need to build on what was pre-existing, as well as to coordinate assistance amongst themselves. The key informants certainly felt that reintegration programming was increasingly framed within interventions to assist a wider array of ‘vulnerable families’.

The research does point to a few areas relating to stigmatization where development and humanitarian colleagues could pool their emerging knowledge. The first is on the stigma that reintegrating girls may face if it is thought they have transgressed social roles – in particular through an active sexual life; the second is the stigma stemming from fear that communities (and families) might have towards adolescents returning from juvenile detention facilities or from association with armed fighters. The final area is that of working with education staff, who play an enormous role in the reintegration of students - both in terms of social inclusion and building confidence in the children’s abilities. Given that an array of strategies and training modules for educators have been developed, the next step could be for them to be shared more systematically and jointly evaluated.
MEASUREMENT OF ‘SUCCESSFUL’ REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMING

Given the number of documents that were reviewed, it is clear that much of the research on reintegration, specifically the operational research, is weak; the majority of it is descriptive with little evidence base. Disaggregation of data (beyond gender) is fairly rare, providing insufficient insight into key factors in reintegration, such as disability, length of time separated, family violence prior to separation, etc. (Wedge, forthcoming).

In addition, it is important to know that reintegration is sustained and ‘successful’ (a designation preferably achieved through setting and measuring high-quality indicators with children and their families). However, there are extremely few longitudinal studies on children’s reintegration in low and lower-middle income countries; war-affected programming can draw on the research of Elizabeth Jareg and Theresa Bettancourt, amongst a handful or others, while in development settings, Family for Every Child and its partners in Mexico and Moldova are currently conducting a 2 year project. Another aspect is the lack of baseline data on children reintegrating within the context of an armed conflict and their peers. It may be possible for development colleagues to undertake retrospective research (or weave a few such questions into other research), in order to tease out the effectiveness of different reintegration interventions.

There are plenty of critics of the cost of reintegrating each individual child. Development and humanitarian colleagues need to band together to produce solid, evidence-worthy research that tackles cost effectiveness, amongst other issues.

Finally, there is much to be learned and implemented about research methodology, particularly given the need for longitudinal studies on different reintegration approaches and settings. Practitioners and academics need to discuss research models that can be started within a conflict setting and transitioned through recovery and on into the development decades (Jareg, 2005). The current review of monitoring and evaluation practices by Home: the Child Recovery and Reintegration network will provide a solid basis for some of that learning.

CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

There is little systematic research and documentation of children being active agents in their personal reintegration journeys. However, the research highlighted three particular opportunities in both contexts: creating an individual reintegration plan; being a peer advocate (i.e. on crime, recruitment or migrating for work); and indicator-setting for the individual and / or programme. In terms of the latter, indicators provide an opportunity for all child protection actors to challenge each other to set and measure them with children and families, and then disseminate high quality results.
The paucity of examples documented highlights the need of most child protection workers to have role models and coaching on the effective participation of children in their own reintegration, and despite the pressures of daily work (and armed conflict) to find creative means of embedding the approach in their programming.

CONCLUSION

As the paper has illustrated, development colleagues can provide a wealth of information and experience to child protection workers in war-affected settings, particularly in addressing stigma of reintegrating children; strengths-based approaches to the assessment of a family’s financial and social resources; linking prevention of separation with reintegration work; and increasingly, the role of cash transfers in alleviating the vulnerability of children.

Whilst it is pleasing to see so many areas where knowledge can be shared, there are many common gaps in research. These gaps are both in terms of methodologies (i.e. longitudinal studies, acquiring baseline data, disaggregation, measurement against a control group) and specific knowledge (i.e. identity-formation; good practice in using mobile phones and helplines to monitor children’s well-being post-reunification; informal and self-directed reintegration). There are also areas where learning from development colleagues could be advanced, such as applying research from children transitioning out of care to those adolescents opting for independent living, and good practice in the use of volunteers to monitor reintegrated girls and boys.

Finally, and of utmost importance, child protection managers lack both consistent funding and the skilled social service workforce that is needed to implement and consistently learn from high quality reintegration programming, and to do so in a way that honours children’s agency in this a most personal of journeys. These weaknesses at the centre of the formal child protection system need to be tackled in a concerted manner, as humanitarian programmers ‘inherit’ staff, resources and structures from development settings, as well as feed back into it.

It is hoped that this research has made it easier for child protection practitioners in war-affected settings to identify specific knowledge they can glean from development colleagues, and pointed a common path to improve the protection of separated girls and boys as they move back into family and community life.
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