



Report

Preparing the children and armed conflict agenda for the future

4 – 6 April 2022 | WP2010

In association with:



Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for **CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT**





Report

Preparing the children and armed conflict agenda for the future

4 – 6 April 2022 | WP2010

This Wilton Park Dialogue was organised in partnership with Save the Children, War Child, the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC).

Foreword

The creation of the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) agenda 25 years ago signalled a new era of global commitment to preventing grave violations against children in armed conflicts and holding perpetrators to account. With a total of 426 million children currently living in conflict zones, more still needs to be done to galvanise commitments to protecting children in conflict.

Since the CAAC mandate was established, an average of 25 children have been killed or maimed every single day. The 2021 CAAC report marked the highest number ever for verified violations perpetrated against children at 23,982. Rape and sexual violence, killing and maiming, abduction, the recruitment and use of children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access to children are the six grave violations against children in armed conflict identified by the UN Secretary General, and can serve as a litmus test for how children are being affected by war.

The 25th anniversary of the CAAC mandate has allowed us to take stock of how it has contributed to better protecting children in armed conflict, what good practices have been identified and can be replicated, which barriers continue to impede progress and, most importantly, what are the existing and future challenges to children in situations of armed conflict that need to be addressed. With these issues in mind, it must be possible to envision the next steps to take to increase protection for children and prevent violations in the first place.

Virginia Gamba, SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict



Introduction

The Dialogue brought together over 40 representatives engaged in the Children Affected by Armed Conflict agenda from twelve countries and followed the launch earlier this year of a comprehensive study by the Office of the SRSG CAAC (OSRSG CAAC) which analysed the evolution of the 25-year mandate, how it has been implemented and suggested ways forward that informed the discussions of the Dialogue. Attendees were from UN Member States, the United Nations, regional organisations, civil society organisations, young representatives affected by conflict and legal and child rights advisors and academics.

The meeting explored how policy, programme and research actors can come together to help support, build momentum, and make tangible progress in preparing the CAAC agenda for the future. This included ideas to better integrate more robust prevention and protection practices across the work of partners while strengthening the role and capacities of local, national, and regional stakeholders in this space.

The discussions were guided by the four-cross cutting pillars of the CAAC agenda - **engagement, protection, accountability, and prevention** - and had the following specific objectives:

- Identify what practical actions and measures can be taken to better protect children in armed conflict, based on the recommendations in the 25th anniversary study.
- Identify best practices and lessons learned, as well as address the challenges and barriers to the implementation of the CAAC mandate as set out by the report.
- Provide a platform for participating states and agencies to showcase initiatives they are undertaking that contribute to the CAAC agenda in both protection and prevention.
- Explore best practices from other contexts to better understand how the children and armed conflict agenda has been advanced, with a view to identify concrete actions, and strengthening linkages and partnerships.
- Identify how children and young people's voices are currently heard in policy discussions and engage them directly on how this can be improved to ensure their experiences inform policy development moving forward.

1. CAAC at 25 years: the next 25 years

1.1 The changing nature of conflict

1. Over the last 25 years, the international community has strengthened its commitment to better protect children living in conflict zones and as a result significant progress has been made. Nevertheless, children continue to suffer from armed conflict, including in cross-border conflicts, in inter-communal violence, during coups and even humanitarian crises. In 2021, the United Nations verified almost 24,000 grave violations against children, 55% of which were by non-State armed groups, followed by State forces (25%) and the rest through other incidents, including crossfire, use of improvised weapons and explosive remnants of war. Evolving conflict dynamics and their impact on children in conflict situations demonstrate that regardless of the principles of protecting children in armed conflict, addressing these issues varies depending on the context of each individual conflict. It is, therefore, pivotal to analyse challenges and opportunities from different aspects that could result in a more holistic approach to protecting children in armed conflict.

Challenges & Opportunities

2. At all times, the protection of children should remain the priority of all stakeholders, and political ownership of the mandate must be sustainable and strong. The CAAC mandate must be prioritised by states on a global scale through awareness-raising,

cohesive messaging, coherent action and coordination. This also strengthens child protection and child rights expertise, helping ensure such capacity is present when and where it is needed.

3. An existential challenge is funding for such activities. How these activities are funded, where the resources are coming from, and what the existing gaps are, need to be clear and transparent. This would address the resourcing of the actors within the CAAC community, including OSRSG CAAC, UNICEF and civil society organisations, and would improve the quality of discussion with donors.
4. Training of key actors should be provided. For instance, the provision of CAAC training for UN Special Envoys, investigative panels and others may ensure the inclusion of the CAAC language and data on rights violations in their reports to address the issues consistently and in a timely fashion.
5. CAAC language and themes need to feature prominently as part of peace processes and in peace agreements, including language that highlights the safeguarding of children's interests. Parties to conflict dealing with the 'softer' issue of children can often pave the way for consensus on tougher issues. In addition, there is a need for standard language and practice on how to engage with children during peace negotiations in order to ensure their voices are heard and issues addressed.
6. Increased and continuous engagement with non-State actors was emphasised as a key strategy to get these groups to prioritise child rights. To facilitate the engagement with non-State armed groups, it is important to identify key partners with the capacity to educate armed groups on the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and other relevant laws. Some participants pointed to a possible need for a dedicated child protection IHL organisation.

1.2 Security, Child Rights and the CAAC mandate

7. It is crucial to better understand and communicate why children find themselves associated with armed groups, including those designated as terrorists. Some are physically coerced to join under brutal conditions including abductions, but others may have no other options but to join a party to the conflict for different purposes including identity, prospective livelihoods and to protect the family. Regardless of the reason for their association, it is important to underline that they remain primarily victims who were coerced by circumstances into becoming a member of an armed group.
8. Children recruited into armed groups are viewed in various ways by national authorities and communities, either as victims or offenders or both, and the result is often stigma. To exacerbate the situation further, children who end up detained are often held in adult prisons or tried in military or adult courts. In the context of counterterrorism, primacy is often given to counter-terror laws over child rights, resulting in children being tried in special terrorist courts or adult military courts. These courts do not often have children's rights as a priority in their processes.
9. There is a misconception that protecting the rights of children comes at the expense of security. It is important to reinforce that child recruitment is one of the worst violations of child rights and children who are recruited and used must be considered victims. Respect for human rights is the core of true security. Support needs to be provided to strengthen the capacities of national institutions in the rights of children with a dual emphasis on relevant IHL and human rights law. This could enable a collective effort to develop a shared training package to ensure the protection of children irrespective of their classification as victims or perpetrators.
10. Comprehensive national and regional policies should also be in place where this is not the case. Strategies for child protection, such as national legislation with provisions to protect children, age verification mechanisms, and prevention plans

must be complemented by systematic funding for child protection and reintegration and its inclusion in all accountability mechanisms.

1.3 Reintegration of Children Affected by Armed Conflict

11. To achieve more effective and sustainable reintegration into normal childhoods for children affected by armed conflict, an in-depth analysis of the challenges needs to be conducted. One of the challenges identified was the lack of systematic cooperation between the UN and CSOs. Despite the strengthened partnership between the UN and CSOs, the need is for a stronger coordination mechanism that could assist in common messaging and training regarding child reintegration across the partners' work.
12. It is noteworthy that oftentimes CAAFAG departing from armed forces and groups have limited access to full reintegration support due to the lack of shared understanding among security and other actors of child protection and the role of duty bearers for DDR programming and security sector reform. More effective and operational linkages between policy, programme and research actors engaged in prevention and response across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus is also required.
13. To overcome the challenges and address gaps and needs, it is essential to identify the spaces where reintegration approaches and interventions are being developed by sectoral partners and build upon existing opportunities. Successful reintegration is contingent on more effective cooperation and joint action amongst the partners across a child's lifetime. There has been some recent movement in this direction. Most notably, the module on children has been recently updated in the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS), including diverse UN agencies, NGOs and research institutes. DDR operational guidance notes were developed by the African Union with support from the World Bank Group. The Committee on Rights of Child (CRC) regularly issues General Comments which enhance child rights on a regular basis. The Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers also issued three working papers calling for a more comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach to child reintegration.
14. Building upon existing efforts, new opportunities can be explored to reinforce these commitments. An alternative Global Reintegration Fund that brings together multiple funding and financing streams could be formed and focus on strengthening collective responses to the immediate needs of reintegration of children in conflict areas, while also possibly addressing the root causes of recruitment and re-recruitment. In advance of the establishment of such a fund, several pilot projects to introduce innovative methods could be implemented across the current CAAC countries, and possibly also "at risk" countries.
15. In this context, there is a need to link the humanitarian support to longer-term development initiatives and to diversify funding and financing instruments by engaging partners across the humanitarian, development, and private sectors, and to foster stronger national ownership. OSRSG CAAC has commissioned research to explore ways to diversify partnerships and financing instruments among public and private stakeholders engaged in this space across the HDP Nexus. All partners also agreed that a separate Wilton Park Dialogue – now scheduled for February 2023 - is warranted to parse, recalibrate, and integrate child reintegration approaches into the collective work based on the body of knowledge generated over the past 30 years, as well as a third one just on prevention in the context of the CAAC mandate.

2. Emerging challenges and innovative potential solutions

The session focused on successful good practices in three country contexts: South Sudan, the Philippines, and Niger.

2.1 Case study: South Sudan

In South Sudan, some best practices that enable the implementation of the action plan were observed. A state institution which is accountable for leading CAAC matters was established as well as the working group on justice for children chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Gender. The Juvenile Court and Mobile Court function were used successfully, as judges are mobilised to rural areas to train villages and increase the reach of legislation. Successful training of local chiefs on the implementation of the UN-Government of South Sudan Action Plan was also recognised.

Challenges remain, however, increasing children's vulnerability. Poor command and control structures in armed groups make CAAC engagement harder and limit the ability of actors to prevent grave violations. Amongst armed forces and armed groups, children have moved from one group to another, making it difficult to monitor children. In many cases, education personnel are unpaid, hence there exists an unsustainable schooling system to attract them away from joining groups. In such circumstances, many children are left unsupervised, causing an increase in criminal activities, especially among 12–17 year-old boys. High illiteracy levels also hinder the effectiveness of CAAC-related training and awareness raising. Children released from parties to conflict can also face rejection by their families. The budget for DDR is often limited and most funding is identified to be allocated to UN entities.

Moving forward, there is a need to translate laws and communication materials into local languages. South Sudan expressed their interest in holding a conference on CAAC.

2.2 Case Study: Philippines

The UNICEF-MILF Action Plan stated no child under the age of 18 shall be recruited into armed groups. An Administrative Order centralised all Government efforts for the reintegration of former rebels and created an Inter-Agency Task Force. This includes child returnees of violent extremist groups or children of people killed during the Marawi Siege. The Government has also implemented a formal policy for child reintegration.

Life skills related to peace and leadership are identified as needed to empower children to make a positive impact in their respective communities. A bill to institutionalise support for the welfare and care of orphans in the Bangsamoro region was filed. A resolution in BTA Parliament was also filed to direct the Ministry of Public Order and Safety in implementing the administrative order to help the armed forces of the Philippines to implement different reintegration interventions for the former CAAFAG.

In addition, there is a need to work jointly to ensure that children are prioritised and included in the programmes, budgets and activities of the Government. It is also pivotal to incorporate various programmes and activities into the response to prevent children from being recruited and enable their recovery. Identified as next steps were a review of gender and patriarchal culture and its impact on girls' education, and a study on the underlying reasons why children exit and re-enter armed groups.

2.3 Case study: Niger

In Niger, there is an acknowledgement of the importance of national and regional initiatives and their linkage with reintegration and the CAAC mandate. Oftentimes, children face multiple vulnerabilities. However, a huge gap in accountability remains. Action Plans need to be effectively built into government systems with a clear budget and accountability, and children's needs must be accounted for. There is a need to ensure a safe environment for children's access to education. It was identified that education entities in conflict are often disconnected from the actors engaged in CAAC. It is significant to build engagement to harmonise a common language to promote a joint understanding of CAAC issues across all actors.

3. Hearing the voices of young people

16. Children and young people from conflict-affected countries are rarely heard in policy discussions. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is clear that policymakers need to ensure their experiences and recommendations inform policy development and move towards more structured partnerships with young people. Meaningful participation requires dedicated structures and time to invest and sustain approaches with youth and children, even if this is challenging in the humanitarian and development space. Child participation requires strong safeguarding, especially if young people are participating in justice proceedings, which would require both political will and substantial resourcing to achieve.
17. Moving ahead, meaningful participation could be strengthened by bringing children and young people on board from the outset of policy development and securing their engagement through age-appropriate processes and initiatives that support them. Participation is the right of the child, and their voices and recommendations could be systematically integrated into policy, programme and research spheres. Friends of CAAC groups (i.e., groups of states usually present in conflict countries on the CAAC agenda) should also seek to ensure child-led events. Justice professionals need to work more closely with child protection professionals.

4. Emerging challenges and potential solutions

4.1 Discussion Highlights

Challenge of Sexual Violence

18. Survivors of sexual violence deserve access to appropriate sexual and reproductive health services that meets their short- and long-term needs and are provided in a way that does not stigmatise them in the community. To support this, resource mobilisation should be prioritised to support women with much-needed medical examinations. Many children are born in the context of conflict or in families affiliated with armed groups, including children born of sexual violence. The stigma suffered by children born of rape, in particular, has serious impacts on their ability to get birth certificates and essential services, which can follow them throughout their lives. There is a need for involvement from a range of stakeholders to overcome such issues and support for the survivor's organisations to achieve positive change. Other activities to prioritise are completing the development of a "Platform for Action," a handbook for implementing adequate legislation and a policy that will help countries to comply with their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of children born of sexual violence.

Challenge of Poverty

19. Large numbers of survivors of grave violations live below the poverty line and lack basic requirements, leaving children continuously vulnerable to additional violations,

including recruitment. One remedy discussed was the provision of livelihood support, including vocational training, and equipping children with various skills of their choice. However, a keen eye must be kept on work situations that would take advantage of children in poverty. In sectors such as mining, where child labour is frequently observed, there is a possibility of children being recruited into armed groups simply to work/mine. Limited access to land and other natural resources is also an issue of increasing importance. More in-depth research, in collaboration with academia, is required to better understand the correlation.

Challenge of Climate Change

20. The potential for conflict and violence can also be driven by a combination of climate change vulnerability and larger institutional, governance and socioeconomic instability. The countries most susceptible to climate change are frequently the least developed or are experiencing instability. All countries on the CAAC agenda are those slated to be most affected by climate change. Weather-related disasters, more frequent and intense heat waves, decreased water quality and quantity, food shortages and greater exposure to toxics can result in greater risks of malnutrition, infectious diseases, and allergic and respiratory diseases. If a country or government is unable to provide the resources needed to cope with a changing environment or devastation caused by extreme weather, or if international climate change adaptation help is insufficient, social upheaval is likely. This increases the vulnerability of children to a range of violations. There is also a need to increase the strategic participation of children and young people in climate change policies. Children must have the right to such involvement and should be equipped with the tools to participate effectively.

The impact on children of protecting education

21. Protecting education from attack in situations of armed conflict is one of the essential ways to mitigate the impact of armed conflict on children. Championing the Safe Schools Declaration must be prioritised to ensure that all students and educators, male and female, can learn and teach in safety worldwide. Similarly, safe access to education during armed conflict must be maintained by engaging with school and university communities and other relevant stakeholders in developing risk reduction strategies and comprehensive safety and security plans for attacks on education.
22. The monitoring and reporting of attacks on schools also need to be strengthened through data disaggregation by type of attack, sex and age of victims, location, perpetrators, days of school closure, and type of schooling. Such information will contribute to efforts to prevent and respond to attacks on education.
23. The provision of non-discriminatory assistance for all victims of attacks on education must be in place. In this approach, the different needs and experiences of men and women, as well as vulnerable populations such as persons with disabilities, minorities, and internally displaced persons need to be considered.

The role of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

24. There is a call for more involvement of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to actively promote the rights of children and support the CAAC mandate. This, in turn, would maximise the potential to address all the aspects related to the rights of the child and to monitor aspects related to prevention and reintegration-related issues. The Committee could contribute to monitoring prevention-related issues as well as those identified as the root causes of recruitment and re-recruitment. The Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC) should be signed and ratified by all State Parties, including those not in conflict, as its Article 7 highlighted the importance of States Parties' cooperation and financial assistance for the prevention and victims' rehabilitation and reintegration.

4.2 Forward outlook and key takeaways

Climate change

25. There is a call for intensified research on the impact of climate change on the rights of the child, by, for example, gathering data which measures the increase in disease and mortality owing to climate change patterns or monitoring the impacts on education due to increased incidence of natural disasters. Ongoing data collection by the MEAC project was presented showing that initial findings indicated that a significant minority of respondents/community leaders in Nigeria, who acknowledge climate change and know people whose livelihood has been impacted by it, knew someone who had joined Boko Haram or another armed group because of these difficulties. (Provisional statistics on this were later released showing that ‘in Nigeria, ongoing large-scale surveys across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states found that of those respondents who knew people that experienced livelihood challenges due to climate change, 15 per cent knew someone who joined Boko Haram as a result. Indeed, when former associates of Boko Haram themselves are asked about the impact of climate change on their trajectory into the group, 16 per cent of those who acknowledge climate change-related difficulties, said these were part of the reason they became involved.’ <https://unidir.org/press-release/meac-climate-change-armed-groups>)

Better data and strengthened partnerships

26. There is a strong need to harness the power of academics and engage private sector partners for better data and evidence to highlight the cost of inaction. It is, therefore, significant to build data partnerships to support action around HDP-N and safeguard the protection of those who provide, collect, analyse and use data. This can be supported by a mapping of the data and knowledge of different partners. Furthermore, as the Committee on the Rights of the Child periodically monitors the rights of the child in all the countries on the CAAC agenda, a practical method should be explored to utilise the source to obtain more timely information.

Advocacy

27. Sensitisation of the CAAC mandate, including the institutionalisation of the CAAC principles, should be emphasised. This could facilitate the process of establishing a common language and definitions as well as mainstreaming child rights terminologies. The linkages between the CAAC mandate and the CRC needs to be further strengthened as more countries have signed up to the CRC than the OPAC. Additionally, international obligations by voluntary commitments, such as the Safe Schools Declaration, must be endorsed, implemented and supported.

The rights of the child in an increasingly securitised space

28. In some countries on the CAAC agenda, the narrative has been overtaken by the counter-terrorism agenda. While states own the right to define a group as terrorist and limit rights, the line has regularly been crossed and violations have been committed against children in name of counter-terrorism operations. Furthermore, the definition of a terrorist group remains unclear as states decide on their own definition. This allows room for children to be criminalised for actual or alleged association with such groups. It is, therefore, important to re-emphasise the common agenda and goal which is to protect children regardless of their association with these groups. Children in contact with justice systems should be treated in line with their rights according to the CRC as well as international juvenile justice standards.

Children's agency

29. It was generally agreed that children and youth should be informed and/or invited to dialogues that are relevant to their rights and well-being, including Wilton Park. It is

important to find ways to work together to connect young people and link them to policy, programmes and research spheres at the national, regional and global levels. Children must be empowered with their own agency as resilient human rights defenders.

Trust in the listing and de-listing processes

30. Controversy over the criteria for the listing and delisting of perpetrators in the UN Secretary-General's annual report on CAAC remains a persistent issue. The decisions taken by the Secretary-General are felt by some to lack transparency and be subject to undue influence. It was recommended that the Secretary-General releases the details as to listing and delisting decisions to ensure transparency. Decisions should be made on commonly known data to protect the integrity of the process.

Partnerships and networks

31. To strengthen existing partnerships and expand the networks, the Groups of Friends for CAAC should be established in every country on the agenda. Creating practical steps to ensure there are partners across the community of practice could facilitate better cooperation and stronger partnerships and increase the coherence of collective outcomes. Additionally, there is a shift towards working increasingly with regional actors in the reintegration space. There are opportunities to build on the experiences of the UN and World Bank with regional African organisations in programming and research, and academia in research, such as UNU's Managing Exits programme.

5. Working together towards a shared goal

This session focused on exploring ways to work better together towards a shared end goal. Specific focus was directed on strengthening the CAAC mandate and the protection of children affected by conflict. The session asked the following questions: Who needs to do what? Where possible timescale and steps for action have been included along with general recommendations?

Mainstreaming the CAAC mandate

32. To mainstream the CAAC mandate, CAAC language should be included in key documents such as Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, as well as more frequently in domestic policies and laws. A wider understanding of CAAC and child protection needs to be highlighted focusing on the inclusion of children's voices and distinguishing between conventional child protection and child protection in conflict. The lack of personnel in missions was identified as one of the remaining challenges to mainstreaming the CAAC on the ground in mission settings.

Unpacking of prevention

33. There was a call to highlight the need for prevention and unpack it, including defining its general parameters as there was a risk of including too much. It was recommended that a text be drafted for a UNSC Resolution to unpack prevention more effectively, based on the language of SC resolution 2427. Regional ownership of prevention should also be highlighted. In this approach, scoping visits of fact-finding missions could be conducted. This could be done within the UN CAAC-UNICEF Technical Reference Group and consultations at different levels.

CAAC survey or INDEX

34. By utilising existing data whilst refining new sets, an annual survey relevant to CAAC could be developed¹. The Swiss-hosted Small Arms Survey experience can be used

¹ Save the Children currently publishes an annual "Stop the War on Children" analysis of CAAC trends

as a reference point. This would establish basic baseline data and could suggest an effective method of sharing information. However, the ownership of the data and the level of accessibility need to be taken into consideration and planned for.

UNGA and a CAAC UN Programme of Action

35. A non-binding CAAC UN Programme of Action could be set up by the UN General Assembly. The PoA would include a group of experts as well as the voices of children. This could encourage each region to have individual workshops relevant to their positions and priorities. This would also reach a wider audience and have a more legal and political impact. Best practices from existing POAs (e.g. Small Arms) could be used as references.

Capacity building

36. There is an urgent need for more child protection expertise and capacity, aligned with the correct understanding and broader capabilities.

5.1 Forward outlook and key takeaways

Evidence-based adaptive learning programmes

37. Reintegration has evolved significantly since the 1990s, as have conflict typologies. Shared data is key to help address child's needs in a coordinated manner. Potential next steps could be to develop jointly a series of pilot projects that integrate these learnings. There is also an opportunity to build on experiences from the World Bank support programme to early warning and early action among the AU and RECs, and the UNU Managing Exits Programme, as well as others.

Trust fund to secure predictable long-term financing for reintegration across the HDP

38. Longer-term and sustainable funding and financing are essential. This would require bridging the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus through partnerships, whilst factoring in the immediate and longer-term needs of children. There is also a need for dedicating more effort to co-developing reintegration projects as well as funding grassroots mechanisms and organisations.

Conclusions and next steps

The eleven strategic initiatives and recommendations of the CAAC 25 years report have been used to structure the key findings and recommendations raised during the Wilton Park meeting sessions.

Strategic Area 1 - Strengthened focus on prevention and protection to enable proactive engagements with parties to conflicts relying on CTFMRs and other early warning systems in situations that are not on the CAAC agenda.

Strategic Area 2 - Popularizing the CAAC Mandate. Strengthening advocacy and outreach.

Strategic Area 3 - Enhancing the monitoring and reporting mechanism.

Strategic Area 4 - Delivering on improved reintegration of children. Reintegration needs to be prioritised for survivors of grave violations, needs to identify girls' needs and challenges related to the specific context.

Strategic Area 5 - Strengthening collaboration between Member States, UN bodies (e.g. Security Council Working Group on CAAC, UNGA, Human Rights Council, Committee on the Rights of the Child), OSRSG CAAC, NGOs, children/youth, and others.

Strategic Area 6 - Strengthening collaboration with formal and informal accountability mechanisms.

Strategic Area 7 - Strengthening inclusion of the voice of children.

Strategic Area 8 - Maintaining and reinforcing child protection capacity in United Nations missions and country teams.

Strategic Area 9 - Strengthening of data analysis and information management capacity on CAAC.

Strategic Area 10 - Strengthening collaboration with regional bodies.

Strategic Area 11 - Building a platform for discussion of emerging paradigms.

These strategic initiatives are grouped under four overarching categories: Better the functioning of the CAAC mandate (I), Improve the reintegration of children (II), Strengthen collaboration between partners (III) and Improve data collection and analysis (IV). It should be noted that participants did not jointly agree on the following lists, which are meant merely to illustrate the outcomes of some key discussions.

Better the functioning of the CAAC mandate

Strategic Area 1 - Strengthened focus on prevention and protection to enable proactive engagements with parties to conflicts relying on CTFMRs and other early warning systems in situations that are not on the CAAC agenda.

39. After over 25 of experience across the CAAC community of practice, there is an opportunity to shift the paradigm and change the narrative for child reintegration. Although meeting the reintegration needs of children will always remain paramount, there are calls for a seismic change to integrate a focus on the root causes driving child recruitment and break these recurring dynamics once and for all. As expressed by some participants, "this is a moral imperative".
40. A stronger focus on prevention and protection is predicated on the ability to have a shared understanding, and a shared theory of change, for how to:
 - Prevent violations in armed conflict (conduct a mapping exercise of existing CAAC prevention tools)

- Strengthen collaboration with member states
- Reinforce child protection capacity in UN missions
- Include a discussion on emerging relevant issues (e.g. climate change, water scarcity, future pandemics)
- Target metrics on how to measure prevention
- Aim for longer sustainable prevention programmes – move away from year-to-year funding to guarantee multiyear funding.

Recommendations and responsibilities

- Commission research to deepen understanding around the development of the adolescent brain and the impact of that process on the concept of protection
- Prevention (and protection) can be integrated more effectively if we can harmonise definitional issues around ages of children and youth by building on existing frameworks such as UNSC, ILO, UNICEF, etc
- A dual focus on prevention and reintegration is critical, with joint planning from the outset. Successful prevention and reintegration are contingent on more effective cooperation and joint action among multiple sectoral partners across the HDP Nexus engaged in the life cycle of the child. This needs to be informed by joint planning, and common approaches to collect, analyse and share data among different sectoral partners
- Press the need to look into prevention in countries not listed on the CAAC agenda
- Create a draft text for UNSCR to unpack prevention issues more effectively, based on the language of resolution 2427.

Strategic Area 2 - Popularising the CAAC Mandate. Strengthening advocacy and outreach

41. Advocacy and outreach improvements are predicated on:

- There is also some lack of knowledge among states and NSAFs of frameworks regarding child rights such as Paris Principles, Vancouver Principles and the CRC
- There is also a widespread disregard for legal obligations under international law such as CRC and its optional protocol
- CAAC agenda has been overtaken by the counter terrorism agenda in some countries – child rights have been trampled in many places as a result of counterterror operations
- Controversy exists over the criteria for listing and delisting in the Secretary-General's annual CAAC report. There has been a call for more transparency in the process
- The definition of a terrorist organisation can vary from state to state. Children have been criminalised for membership in this organisation and are not treated as victims
- Arms sales continue to states that violate IHL and commit grave violations
- Juvenile justice and protection are not well understood everywhere, nor always practiced
- Gender and CAAC remain under prioritised

- Agency of children remains under prioritised.

Recommendations and responsibilities

- It was recommended that the NY Group of Friends for CAAC should coordinate with the UN and member states to strengthen cooperation amongst the other Groups of Friends in Geneva and worldwide
- Develop a concept on how to better integrate CAAC concept into the EU common defence source
- Reinforce the priority of the CAAC issue in the Security Council's agenda outside of just the Working Group on CAAC
- Make a political commitment to CAAC policy and programme and in the parliament of the Philippines to address the issue of children being recruited by armed groups
- Support the EU in the implementation of their recommendations on child protection, especially in conflict
- Present all the recommendations as a Decade of Action for CAAC. Need to ensure that any strategy is flexible and adaptive since contexts and interests change
- Strengthening linkages between the CAAC mandate and the Committee on Rights of the Child
- Factor in the increasing role of climate change on the drivers of inequality and poverty that fuel conflict and forced displacement
- Need campaigns to socialise CAAC principles at national levels and with armed actors. This could be through training, support in implementing, support to institutionalise frameworks
- Support accountability within states and groups to follow the principles. Could have CAAC National Action Plans, as with WPS
- Juvenile justice is not well understood everywhere. Need active campaigns to share standards
- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child should actively reassert the definition of a child in all contexts
- Children must be protected at all times, whether they are perpetrators or victims
- Build more bridges between child protection and security actors towards a common approach in counterterrorism/violent extremism settings. There also needs to be nuanced dialogue with actors like states and armed groups
- The UN Secretary General should release the listing criteria. The SG should apply the listing criteria from the 2010 report consistently. Member states should support the SG to strengthen political courage to make listing decisions that are consistent with the criteria but may be unpopular / politically charged. We also need to be better at responding to the evolution of conflict and needs of the child when it comes to (a) how we list countries and (b) how we de-list countries, (c) and how we engage in dialogues with potential countries that could be listed from a prevention perspective. This will better protect the CAAC mandate itself
- Child reintegration programming and planning needs to be gender and age sensitive.

Strategic Area 3 - Enhancing the monitoring and reporting mechanism

42. To ensure broad, constant and sustainable monitoring, reporting mechanisms must:

- Enhance Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms and data management
- Improve gathering of data for attacks on schools and related personnel
- Ensure the ease and accessibility of reporting mechanisms.

Recommendations and responsibilities

- Ensure effective reporting mechanisms are in place, especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas, where children are at greater risk of grave violations
- Strengthen the monitoring and reporting of attacks on schools
- Improve the disaggregation of data by type of attack, sex, age, location and the actor(s) responsible
- In the case of monitoring attacks on schools, improve the disaggregation of data relating to the days of school closure and type of schooling, to improve efforts to prevent and respond to future attacks on education
- Engage with children to ensure their meaningful participation in reporting mechanisms, such as through briefings, design of programmes, conference sessions etc
- Ensure that more child protection capacities are in place to support services, engagement and monitoring.

Improve the reintegration of children

Strategic Area 4 - Delivering on improved reintegration of children. Reintegration needs to be prioritised for survivors of grave violations and needs to identify girls' needs and challenges related to the specific context.

- Child recruitment is on the rise across the globe—especially affecting girls. Going forward a longer-term approach that also addresses and breaks the repeating cycles of recruitment is needed
- There is a lack of shared understanding around children's rights and DDR, SSR making it difficult for partners to effectively address reintegration needs, and the root causes of recruitment across the HDP-N
- There remains limited data on funding and financing trends, despite some ongoing initiatives
- Partners are often reluctant to share available data due to a combination of political sensitivity issues and competition for resources.

Recommendations and responsibilities

- There is a need to promote a shared understanding of children's rights and the CAAC mandate to inform efforts related to SSR and reintegration. Currently, there is a lack of universal clarity around the rights of children and the roles of duty bearers and partners throughout the child lifecycle
- There is a need to strengthen a shared evidence base related to child reintegration needs, and longer-term root causes that continue to drive child recruitment
- Country pilots that focus on regional, national and local needs are needed. The pilots should establish a new shared evidence base that will support discussions

across the community of practice to identify new ways of tackling child reintegration that aims to meet needs while breaking patterns of recruitment. A longer-term focus in line with the child's lifecycle is needed (minimum 3-5 years of support)

- A common approach to Learning and adaptation to emerging needs on the ground is required. Given the dearth of data, and factors such as competition over resources, short term projects, and staff turnover, there is an urgent need for an overarching adaptive learning and adaptive architecture that ensures data is shared among partners
- There is a need for an innovative financing architecture that can pool the short-term humanitarian and peace funding resources and blend them with longer term financing from development partners and the private sector.

Strengthen collaboration between partners

Strategic Area 5 - Strengthening collaboration between Member States, UN bodies (e.g. Security Council Working Group on CAAC, UNGA, Human Rights Council, Committee on the Rights of the Child), OSRSG CAAC, NGOs, children/youth, and others.

43. Currently, the coordination amongst various CAAC partners is characterised by some as including:

- Lack of implementation of key resolutions and conclusions
- Lack of involvement and participation by children and young people.

Recommendations and responsibilities

- Improving measurability of intervention effectiveness
- Encourage member states to ratify and implement the Paris Principles, OPAC, Vancouver Principles and Safe Schools Declaration
- Gain the support of member states to begin new Groups of Friends on the ground
- Ensure that Action Plans receive resources
- Explore best practices with respect to engaging with different actors
- Implementation of UNSCR 2601. Not seen as effective as it could be, despite education being a key prevention indicator. There is a need to include regional actors
- To effect real change in the next 25 years, then the relevant people must participate and co-create, i.e. children and young people
- Need to work together to identify ways to measure results during and after projects
- Need to map which member states have/have not ratified the Paris Principles in order to increase advocacy
- We need to make sure that following the signing of Action Plans that they are resourced to ensure implementation and follow up
- Explore best practices on how to engage with different actors. This may require a review of protocols at national, regional and global levels to make it clear as to who does what, where, and when across the child's life cycle.

Strategic Area 6 - Strengthening collaboration with formal and informal accountability mechanisms

44. Accountability mechanisms hinge on how we can address:

- Establishing roles and responsibilities of partners
- Listening to the experiences of young people
- Including child protection and reintegration expertise in accountability mechanisms
- Depoliticizing the listing and delisting process
- How children can access education in a safe environment
- How to build engagement to harmonise a common language to promote joint understanding of CAAC issues
- National and regional initiatives should be linked to international reintegration and CAAC initiatives
- Develop a strategy that all UN mandates are “CAAC washed”, i.e. assessed for whether CAAC issues can/should be incorporated, and that appropriate capacities in Geneva and New York are provided
- The pressing need to monitor recruitment and other violations in countries that are not listed as a preventative measure
- Link up education entities in conflict that are often disconnected from those engaged in CAAC
- More efforts are needed to change community norms to prioritise child needs and protection.

Recommendations

- There is a need to listen and ensure that the voices of young people influence awareness around protection and accountability
- Systematically including and funding child protection and child reintegration expertise in all accountability mechanisms
- Criteria for listing and delisting that is perceived free from political considerations. Recommendation for the Secretary-General to release the criteria for listing and delisting for transparency
- Keep CAAC high on the UN agenda with Arria meetings
- Give statistics a human face wherever possible in communications
- Include child participation that is meaningful and safe
- Strengthen funders’ ownership and political commitment to sustainable child protection
- Need universal understanding as to what reintegration is, i.e. a short-, medium- and long-term process as opposed to a one-off event
- Understand the fluidity and reasoning of children going in and out of armed groups

- Be clear as to when prevention starts and what are the triggers. Definitions will be key
- Improve CAAC knowledge management and be clear about where it sits
- Realise the complexity of intersectionality and multiple vulnerabilities and violations.

Strategic Area 7 - Strengthening inclusion of the voice of children

45. “Although we have become better at capturing the stories of children, we have learned that although this is useful as an advocacy tool, it’s not enough with respect to strengthening children’s agency.” The voice of the children should be at the core of the CAAC mandate.

46. Successful inclusion is predicated upon:

- Including local actors
- Engaging with youth and listening to young people’s experiences
- Engaging with children and including children’s voices in proceedings and policies.

Recommendations and responsibilities

- Work more effectively with local actors and NGOs, including building on the experience of War Child’s dialogues with youth (‘Voice More’)
- Promote effective and meaningful engagement of the youth
- Listen and ensure that the voices of young people influence the strengthening of awareness around the dual issue of protection and accountability.
- Systematically including and funding child protection and child reintegration expertise in all accountability mechanisms
- Bring children’s voices into peace agreements and/or alternative processes in contexts where there are no peace processes.

Strategic Area 8 - Maintaining and reinforcing child protection capacity in United Nations missions and country teams.

47. Child protection capacity integrity is predicated on the ability to address the following issues:

- Maintaining and expanding capacity for child protection
- Understanding best practices using existing data and experiences
- Leveraging the use of Special Envoys and actors with similar roles
- Integrating the HDP-Nexus in line with the child lifecycle approach
- Matching expertise and mandate
- Ensuring the support of member states
- Ensuring sufficient funding.

Recommendations and responsibilities

- There is an urgent need to ensure that more child protection capacities are in place to support services, engagement and monitoring etc

- Make the case of protection as an important capacity to be supported in the short term while capacities are built in the longer term
- Explore best practices in child protection in conflict and how to engage with different actors. This may require joint review protocols at national, regional and global levels to make it clear as to who does what, where, and when across the child's life cycle. Actual protocols will in most cases need to be situation-specific based on agreed principles
- Increase awareness and capacities of Special Envoys and those with similar mandates around children affected by armed conflict, and children and reintegration
- Make sure the mandate and the expertise are matched around protection and prevention
- Follow up on funding for child protection capacity (in line with mandates for UN missions and country teams) in the 5th Committee.

Improve data collection and analysis

Strategic Area 9 - Strengthening of data analysis and information management capacity on CAAC.

48. There is a stated need for measuring impact, preserving and transferring knowledge, data and capacities, and improving data analysis and implementation of the rollout of reintegration initiatives and initiatives on the inclusion of elements for the protection of children in peace processes and mediation efforts. Data analysis capacities are predicated on the ability to:

- Support policy decisions
- Expand the use of data
- Leverage early warning systems
- Include data gathering and analysis in pilot programmes.

Recommendations and responsibilities

- More data and analytical support to policy decisions
- Need to ensure that pilot projects hardwire data trust and adaptive learning from the outset
- Need to have 'room to fail' when working in an iterative pilot project environment, which the current climate does not allow for
- Data sharing amongst all those working on the CAAC and child reintegration portfolios is needed.

Strategic Area 10 - Strengthening collaboration with regional bodies.

49. There is a need to work better with regional bodies, to ensure that child protection and reintegration is an international, regional, national and sub-regional priority. Overall, there is a need to:

- Integrate CAAC issues more into regional and multilateral organisations' agendas and documents
- Encourage national governments in countries on the CAAC agenda to integrate CAAC into national agendas and budgets

- Improve coordination between member states and regional organisations in addressing CAAC.

Recommendations and responsibilities

- Shift to include regional actors in the reintegration space. There are opportunities to build on past experiences and work better with regional African, Asian and South American organisations in programming and research, and academia
- Possibly engage in dialogue with the World Bank regarding its support for the African Union and regional partners across Africa, linking early warning to reintegration related activities
- Develop comprehensive national and regional policies and strategies on child protection, including prevention plans. These must be complemented by systematic funding for child protection and reintegration and its inclusion in accountability mechanisms
- Regional ownership of unpacking prevention should also be highlighted. In this approach, scoping visits of fact-finding missions could be conducted.

Strategic Area 11 – Building a platform for discussion of emerging paradigms

Recommendations and responsibilities

- Provide a platform for participating states and agencies to showcase initiatives they are undertaking that contribute to the CAAC agenda in both protection and prevention
- Complete the development of a Platform for Action, a handbook for law and a policy that will help countries to comply with the obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the children born of sexual violence in conflict.

Wilton Park | January 2023

Wilton Park reports are intended to be summaries of the main points and conclusions of an event. Reports reflect rapporteurs' accounts of the proceedings and do not necessarily reflect the views of the rapporteur. Wilton Park reports and any recommendations contained therein are for participants and are not a statement of policy for Wilton Park, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) or His Majesty's Government.

Should you wish to read other Wilton Park reports, or participate in upcoming Wilton Park events, please consult our website www.wiltonpark.org.uk. To receive our monthly bulletin and latest updates, please subscribe to <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/newsletter/>.