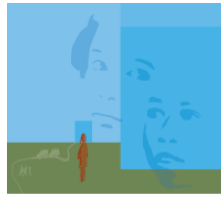




Foreign &  
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Wilton Park



Image: Sylvain Cherkaoui/ Cosmos/Save The Children

Report

## Protecting children from extreme violence: towards a more comprehensive approach to prevention and response

Monday 3 – Wednesday 5 October 2016 | WP1495

In association with The Paris Principles Steering Group



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



Save the Children



## Report

# Protecting children from extreme violence: towards a more comprehensive approach to prevention and response

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### Key points

#### Three key issues

- The protection of children from extreme violence can be divided into three key issues; the prevention of child recruitment and reintegration into society; the prevention and fight against other serious violations against children in armed conflict, such as abduction and exploitation of children; and addressing the impact of armed conflict on children and the failure to respect the rights of all children.

#### Issues of terminology

- There has been some discussion on how the issue should be termed, with 'violent extremism' being more commonly used in formal settings but a current preference of child protection actors to use 'extreme violence' which is seen as less subjective. Whilst violent extremism has garnered a certain cachet extreme violence has not. Shifting the focus to address extreme violence could be an effective preventative mechanism to ensuring that armed groups do not turn into conduits of violent extremism.

#### Holistic approach

- Programmes such as those on education and psychological needs should be integrated into the overall response. These holistic responses are necessary to ensure that whilst the population is being educated, the economy and government are also being stimulated so that the country is developed as a whole. Programmes should also work on the individual, interpersonal and community level of the social fabric from which children cannot be separated.

#### Capacity building

- How to build capacity amongst the staff is a vital factor to consider in programme design to ensure that they have the right tools and qualifications. The support being provided for the staff is just as important as the support being provided for the children, particularly mental health support.

#### Programme assessment

- Programme planning needs to include more rigorous assessment of what has and has not worked in the past regarding whether it is successfully confronting vulnerability and recruitment drivers. However the necessary data is very difficult to access or collate.

#### Psychosocial support

- Many programmers seek to implement light touch, short term, psychosocial support activities, in a one size fits all approach in the misguided attempt to prevent or intervene in someone's mental health. Numerous agencies who work in the field of "psychosocial support" don't even have mental health professionals working in their teams.

## Funding cycles

- The short-term nature of the current funding cycles is dangerous as more harm than good can be caused by starting programmes that cannot be sustained. Consequently there is a need to be proactive, educate donors and move to a multi-year funding model so that organisations can plan for the long-term.

## Introduction

1. Children's acute vulnerability to conflict, particularly to recruitment and use by parties to conflict is widely recognised and acknowledged.
2. Following various UN Security Council Resolutions some progress has been made in addressing the overall issue of recruitment and use of children through a range of legal and normative frameworks. However child protection and other humanitarian agencies are increasingly challenged to adequately address grave violations of children's rights and respond to child protection needs. This is particularly so in an era where the nature of conflict is increasingly complex, with transnational influences, and where the forms of violence are increasingly extreme.
3. Examination of the changing dynamics of conflict over the past decade has highlighted a number of key factors. These include a number of armed groups aligned or governed by specific extremist ideologies; changes in the existing drivers such as poverty, exclusion and marginalisation; the transnational nature of conflict; the use of social media as a key recruitment and propaganda tool; the extreme nature of some contemporary violence and control, and the involvement of children in such asymmetric warfare. The geographic spread of extreme violence and its impact on children can be seen in the national and regional impact of Syria's devastating civil war, Nigeria's ongoing struggle with Boko Haram and East Africa's efforts against Al-Shabaab. The breakdown of law and order and fragmentation of civil society in countries from Mali and others in the Sahel, to the Central African Republic and Southern Thailand has also exposed children to widespread extreme violence.
4. The impact of socio-economic instability and armed conflict in a variety of contexts has led to large numbers of children being displaced, separated from their families, and vulnerable to being forcibly abducted, forcibly recruited and used by armed forces and armed groups. Children and young people growing up in underdeveloped areas, rural villages or refugee/ IDP camps, are often ignored, marginalised or mistreated by authorities. Many view enlistment as the best option to ensure some degree of security, while others may also become disenfranchised by or disillusioned with the society in which they live, or influenced by others to join armed groups who engage in extreme violence. This has had negative impacts on development efforts and perpetuates cycles of conflict.
5. Even when children attempt to return to normal life and/or a degree of peace returns, the impact of and exposure to extreme violence often leaves them traumatised, and raises unprecedented challenges to their reintegration in communities. The social and psychological impact on families and wider communities can be devastating, as they recover from their own experiences of conflict and extreme violence. Furthermore, the reaction of communities and authorities can also gravely impact them resulting in stigma and even detention.
6. There has been a widespread debate as to how this phenomenon should be termed. Concern has been voiced in relation to the sensitivities of terminology and interpretation. There is also recognition that many of the forms of violence that children are being forced to engage in are not new, however, the way such violence is interpreted and understood is changing. In raising these concerns, Child Protection practitioners have emphasised the need to focus on the rights and needs of children affected by such violence. Here, Child Protection practitioners have favoured the term Extreme Violence, with this preference informing the focus of this conference. Specifically, there is a need for all actions taken to prevent and respond to the

involvement of children with armed forces and groups to be done within the ambit of the Paris Principles and other regional frameworks. Furthermore, focus on a child-rights perspective based on the needs of the child, family and strengthening the resilience of the community is key for the prevention of recruitment as well as the release and reintegration of children in post-conflict recovery.

## **Progress and challenges in the protection of children in extreme violence**

### **The Paris Principles**

7. Set out guidelines which seek to prevent the recruitment and use of children and assist their reintegration into their families and society. 2017 sees the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of these principles providing an opportunity for renewed commitment from all stakeholders to assess the situation, existing framework and identify potential areas for adaption and progress.

### **Three key issues**

8. The protection of children from extreme violence can be divided into three key issues; the prevention of child recruitment and reintegration into society; the prevention and fight against other serious violations against children in armed conflict, such as abduction and exploitation of children; and addressing the impact of armed conflict on children and the failure to respect the rights of all children.

### **Recruitment drivers**

9. Whilst there are generally agreed drivers leading children to become more vulnerable to being recruited by armed groups – lack of options, lack of access to good education, militarised environment, corruption, abuse of power, experiences of injustice and discrimination – further examination is required to understand better the influence of the changing nature of conflict and extreme violence on these more established drivers. Similarly, further research on the role of social media is needed. It is thus crucial to have good resources on both the policy and programmatic side, in addition to space to discuss these opportunities.

### **Violent extremism drivers**

10. There is no single demographic, economic, social or educational profile that drives people to violent extremism. However, the influence of ideology and religion is often overplayed. Though religious ideology is often used as a tool, many who join extremist groups are not religious in the beginning, they become so. Poverty and unemployment can also be drivers, as demonstrated by those under Boko Haram's influence who consider they have no other way to build their businesses.

Exposure to violence is one of the strongest drivers for engagement with armed groups and violent extremism. However, the psychological and social impacts of such exposure are often overlooked. Exposure to violence, particularly at the hands of the state, can lead to participation in violence in retaliation. Feelings of marginalisation and being targeted by the state, such as in Syria under Bashar al-Assad or in Columbia, can perpetuate cycles of violence.

Seen in this way, conflict breeds violent extremism, and not vice versa, which necessitates greater investment in preventing conflict from breaking out in the first place.

### **Impact on communities**

11. Conflict ruptures the fabric of society which not only forces people to search for alternative support systems to meet their needs but causes resentment and hatred. The psychological impact of experiencing violence can entrench these feelings for a generation, leading to a desire for retaliation and revenge. However, there is a high percentage of people in conflict-affected communities who do not engage in violent extremism, whose experiences and support can assist in reducing recruitment.

Successful countering of recruitment and reintegrating children affected by armed conflict is dependent on a clear analysis of the complex landscape of push and pull factors, including grievances, social injustice and horizontal injustice experienced by the local community.

### **Primacy of power**

12. The behaviour of the political elites in fragile states is often predictable; their primary focus is to consolidate power and hold onto it. All too often children are a disposable commodity. These political elites are not concerned with international laws, therefore in order to protect the children in a more effective and sustainable way practitioners should work at the community level.

### **Conflicts today**

13. The nature of conflict is changing with a number of traditional factors being challenged. War is increasingly being worked out indiscriminately in urban areas, resulting in a greater effect on civilian populations. Conflicts are also becoming more protracted and asymmetric, with civil wars tending to involve more than one foreign influence. Here the multiplication of non-state armed groups is key, with five times more emerging in the last few years than in the 60 before. The presence of these groups with their fluid alliances adds another layer of complexity to current conflicts.

### **New wars and new complexities**

14. We are in an era where conflicts are evolving in new ways; this change is prompting calls for a better understanding of the aim of the conflict and a settling of the ambiguity it causes for those in the field and the implementers. Although the increased complexity of war has been recognised, the international community has been slow in addressing the needs of the subsequent issues this throws up. One of these issues is the unprecedented use of the internet by extremist groups to recruit and spread their word. Another is children born of war who struggle to find a role in society and are stigmatised. Sustainable strategies developed for children in extreme violence should pay attention to the situation of all those children affected- not just the children associated with armed forces or groups. Moreover the way that sustainable strategies are developed and addressed should pay attention to these new dilemmas and the cultural dilemmas of the societies in questions.

### **Impact on children**

15. Whilst conflict impacts all involved on the cognitive, physiological and emotional level it has particularly devastating effect on children. As the conflict progresses, children's perception of their place in the world and responsibilities shifts. In addition, in several conflict situations role models for children are now martyrs or brigade commanders (or they are being promoted as such) creating a new sense of moral duties. Consequently as these children develop they have problems establishing right and wrong, and problems in understanding that they are not responsible for the conflict. This severely limits their capacity to create a future for themselves.

### **Children as the victims**

#### **Conflict prevention**

16. The recruitment and use of children in military groups is a clear early warning indicator for armed conflicts - for example children and adolescents were trained in Rwanda prior to 1994. This suggests that an increased focus on the recruitment and use of children earlier would assist in the de-escalation of potential conflict situations.

#### **Education's role in recruitment**

17. The various manners in which armed groups recruit children into their ranks need to be countered with programme design. ISIS, for example, visits schools, mosques and other areas frequented by children as recruiting grounds. By focusing on education as an avenue to change children and religiously radicalise them, ISIS repackages the



curriculum to turn children against their parents. Parents in turn have stopped sending their children to school.

### **Military use of schools**

18. Schools must be zones of peace, where children are granted protection even in times of conflict. Yet, increasingly, schools are being attacked with detrimental effects on children. Apart from the direct and physical damage to schools, conflict can result in the forced closure or the disrupted functioning of these institutions. Also of great concern is the use of schools for military purposes, as recruitment grounds and polling stations. Under international humanitarian law schools are protected civilian objects. Direct physical attacks and the closure of these institutions as a result of direct threats have since 2011 been added as triggers for inclusion on the list of the Secretary-General of parties to conflict committing grave violations against children in armed conflict. However some argue that attacks on schools are in some senses legitimate as many public and educational spaces are used as bases by armed actors once they have been moved out of their initial premises. Therefore it would be helpful to push for the military use of schools to be a violation.

### **Experiences**

19. Whilst there are some children who are exposed to extreme violence, there are others who are just inside the conflict situation or are experiencing the distress, displacement and separation from families that can accompany conflict. The international community has the expertise to respond to all these children affected by conflict according to what those needs are. Nonetheless in both circumstances there is a need for safe spaces (e.g. schools) to be protected and the need for safe relationships to help mitigate children's experiences of conflict. An example of this can be seen in Syria where children attend workshops run in consultation with the local leader.

### **Laws and frameworks**

20. Children involved in or associated with extreme violence should be treated as victims. However there is a trend which is treating children as perpetrators where, under counter terrorism law, they are placed in de-radicalisation centres where the conditions oppress their liberties. Yet the use of a Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) lenses through which to interpret the situation is not helpful for child protection discourse on children as victims, thus there is a need to change narrative for child protection. Therefore laws and frameworks are vital to ensure that the rights of the child are upheld as the norm, but need to be developed with a better understanding of CVE/Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) discourses.

### **Detention of children**

#### **Detention**

21. The Paris Principles clearly set out that children should not be detained and those that are should be released. Current evidence suggests that the presumption against detention is slowly eroding with a growing number of governments responding to armed groups by detaining and torturing children and family members. International political efforts include United Nations Security Council Resolution 2225, supported by the Permanent Mission of Malaysia, which looks to operationalise child protection resources so that people on the ground will continue to visit detention centres and report which will contribute to developing effective policy. Nonetheless, there is a need to look at the issue from the angle of what support, both political and programmatic, is being provided for those coming out of armed groups and those in detention who are exceptionally vulnerable.

#### **International investigations**

22. Human Rights Watch has investigated the growing trend of child detention in 15 countries. They found that more and more children, who have no affiliation with armed groups, are being detained based on flimsy evidence, massive round ups, participation

in protests or due to informants after the 'reward' money. In Iraq, women and children were being detained due to the suspected actions of their husband/father. Further international investigations have revealed that whilst in detention the use of torture, to extract evidence, and deaths whilst in custody are increasing. A United Nations investigation concludes that it is far more likely that children are tortured whilst in detention than adults. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo it was found that 40% of children reported ill treatment whilst being detained. Amnesty International researched 17,000 child deaths in custody between March 2011 and June 2015. However due to the nature of the issue it is very hard to obtain reliable data, for instance in Syria 1400 children have been taken into custody, of which 460 have been released. The fate of the other 940 children is unknown

### **Actions against detention**

23. The increase in detention of children normalises its use. In order to mitigate this and push back on the eroding of international norms three key principle actions need to be implemented: Children with extreme groups must be transferred to organisations for reintegration; governments must stop detaining children; and finally if children have been detained then they must be treated in accordance with juvenile justice. Moreover, given that international detention law is vague, the United Nations Peacekeeping department are working on standardising operating procedures on the treatment of children in detention and to develop concrete proposals to explicitly outline what is expected and desired from the actors involved. Capacity also needs to be built within national governments ministries to demonstrate that detaining children is an inefficient manner of dealing with the situation which can lead to an increase threat in the future.

### **Detention and national security**

24. With the rise of non-state violent extremism national security concerns are taking precedence over child's rights. Governments have increasingly been detaining children who are believed to be national security threats. Here Western governments have set a poor example; the United States detained a large number of children as a preventative measure to keep them off the battle field between 2003-08. Those detained as a result of national security threats are often not accorded due process with international standards of detention and justice regularly flouted. In light of this, there is a need for sensitivity around the description of conflicts as the language of 'counter violent extremism' and 'preventing extreme violence'. The use of these terms is influencing the talk around children involved with extremist groups which in turn affecting how various governments' are treating or responding to children. As a result it is becoming increasingly more difficult for children to leave armed groups safely without fear of retribution. There is also a need to manage the expectations of children who believe that they will be prosecuted if they leave armed groups. The availability of information in each context will influence the tools implementers use and what they do. In the case of the Lord's Resistance Army radio was effectively used to disseminate information that children would not be prosecuted.

### **Handover protocol**

25. The initiative currently being developed by the UN is built on the need to strengthen safeguards of children whilst in detention. It is aimed at strengthening the cooperation between military and humanitarian actors by outlining the roles of these actors and the protection of children in these situations. The protocol intends to create the space to negotiate the release of children where there isn't the space to negotiate their use on armed conflict. These protocols have the potential to be useful in cross-border conflicts; however they do have their challenges; for example in cross border conflicts, agreement from the country of origin on how to deal with the children is needed. Additional concerns were raised regarding problems that have arisen when governments agree to the protocols but see them as insignificant in relation to extreme violence and terrorism e.g. in Mali. Efforts must go further to demonstrate the ability of programmes that can be implemented to assist in reintegration efforts; suggestions of ensuring that Ministries of Social Welfare are key participants in a handover protocol

were made. Nonetheless, as the protocols will deal with those children who have escaped, not those who have been forcibly detained, safeguards for children in detention still need to be advocated for; for examples in some where it is not possible to negotiate the release of children efforts need to be made to push for humane treatment.

## **Towards effective programming**

### **Programmatic guidance**

26. All policy and programming interventions should be guided by International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law as well as other relevant frameworks such as the Paris Principles. In adopting the Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) in 2015, governments around the world agreed to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers and fulfil the provisions of the Optional Protocol. Specifically, Target 8.7 which compels States to take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst form of child labour, including the recruitment and use of children, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms. Adding to these clear mandates for change are no fewer than 11 United Nations Security Council resolutions aimed at preventing and ending grave child rights violations in armed conflict. However how these international laws, frameworks, guidelines and norms can be translated into relevant and effective instruments in addressing the needs and rights of all children affected by armed conflict still needs to be crystallised. In particular how programmes can be targeted to address the vulnerability and impact of extreme violence on children within the SDGs needs to be addressed as others will fill the void.

### **Holistic approach**

27. Interventions need to be comprehensive. Programmes such as those on education and psychological needs should be integrated into the overall response. These holistic responses are necessary to ensure that whilst the population is being educated, the economy and government are also being stimulated so that the country is developed as a whole. Programmes should also work on the individual, interpersonal and community level of the social fabric from which children cannot be separated. When responding to the long term needs of children, separation from the normal systems is not recommended; instead their reintegration into regular systems, such as education, is vital for sustainable peacebuilding. Nonetheless, additional support to address affect children's special needs is necessary. The holistic approach should also include investing more in conflict prevention and prevention of recruitment in general as well reintegration strategies.

### **Capacity building**

28. How to build capacity amongst the staff is a vital factor to consider in programme design to ensure that they have the right tools and qualifications. The support being provided for the staff is just as important as the support being provided for the children, particularly mental health support. There is a need to increase resources and personnel especially in the areas of staff management and wellbeing to increase capacity.

### **Programme effectiveness**

29. Rigorous evidence based planning and programming processes need to be improved. Presently the effectiveness of programmes is assessed on completion and the rate of return is either not utilised or updated. In order to deliver effective results, monitoring and evaluation strategies and frameworks measuring programme success should be incorporated into the planning so that the success of programmes is measured throughout enabling adaption in real time. Furthermore a comprehensive long-term approach which assess the long-term impacts on child soldiers and builds the resilience in terms of livelihoods of the population should be implemented. This requires predictable and long-term resource mobilisation and a management capacity



not currently available.

### **Programme assessment for new approaches**

30. There is a need to recalibrate existing programme planning and operations processes, adapt existing tools and develop new approaches for effective programme delivery. There is also a call to place extreme violence within broader release and reintegration programming and the formal disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes. To ensure that these interventions are better based on good practice there is a need to be honest about the relationship between the length and effectiveness of projects and the range of people they can reach. Programme planning needs to include more rigorous assessment of what has and has not worked in the past regarding whether it is successfully confronting vulnerability and recruitment drivers. In addition, there is a need to take into account due consideration of the overall political, strategic, social and economic contexts in which programmes are implemented alongside previous lessons learned from successful programming/projects. However the necessary data is very difficult to access or collate.

### **Innovative approaches**

31. Many aspects that have been identified as important are not currently being comprehensively addressed if at all, this is particularly the case with mental health issues or alternative mediums for recovery such as sport. Consequently there is a need to look closely at what elements should be incorporated into programme planning to ensure a holistic and effective response. These include aspects such as providing long-term psychological support; viable opportunities to violence; incorporating platforms of power in a non-violent way and promoting alternative heroes within the community. When implemented in safe spaces, these elements allow the development of safe relationships and resilient initiatives. One innovative approach could be the development of apps that can be used by Youth to develop resilience and mitigating their lack of access. Additionally the potential to improve inter-sectorial programming and collaboration, working with other sectors such as FSL and non-traditional actors including the private sector should be explored more thoroughly.

### **Child centred approach**

32. Children need to be central to emergency responses, not just part of them. Identification of acutely at risk children needs to be done as early as possible. These include children who are unaccompanied and those who are singled out by security forces as terrorist suspects. Onsite psychological first aid would assist in this identification process. In a child centred approach it is important to note that children are not one homogenous group and that there is a fundamental difference between boys and girls. In addition, women and girls play a different role to men and boys in supporting violent extremism groups, which needs to be countered differently. Consequently, the differences between genders need to be reflected in programme design.

### **Improve adolescent/youth empowerment and community engagement**

33. There is general consensus that attention should be paid to strengthening the ability and capacity of children and young people and communities to reject or resist the influence and recruitment efforts of armed forces or armed groups. Some believe that youths and children should be consulted on what they feel they are missing out on and what their needs for the future are in order to better inform programme design. However, there is disagreement over whether children should actually be engaged in the programming and used as peace agents.

### **Psychological effects**

#### **Current psychosocial support**

34. Many programmes borrow ideas from the field of mental health, but often without fully admitting or committing to what that actually means in terms of necessary level of staff

training, level of supervision of staff, level of funding, and level of time. Many seek to implement light touch, short term, psychosocial support activities, in a one size fits all approach in the misguided attempt to prevent or intervene in someone's mental health. Numerous agencies who work in the field of "psychosocial support" don't even have mental health professionals working in their teams. So the first step to any fresh look into release and reintegration processes for children involved in extreme violence would be to ensure we have the right professionals working.

### **Psychological effect**

35. Regardless of how or why children have become associated, the experience of children participating in armed conflict is characterised by an accumulation of risk to their physical, emotional, social and psychological well-being. They are commonly subject to abuse; most of them have witnessed death, killing, and sexual violence. Many have participated in killings and may suffer severe long term psychological consequences. Children recruited also include a large proportion of girls who are often sexually abused by the military. They remain the 'invisible soldiers' and poor attention has been given to their protection, demobilisation and reintegration. Consequently whether forcibly conscripted or not the impact of violence and combat on children needs to be comprehensively assessed. The long term impacts and mental health risks of their individual experiences need to be considered. The psychological effect of extreme violence on children is a more extensive problem than only PTSD with mental symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, sleep problems, somatic symptoms, including chronic pain and disability, and social problems such as lack of social networks, poverty, isolation, difficulty in contact with the social, community and familial and integration problems. Therefore the treatment plan needs to be based on a multidisciplinary and holistic approach. The approach should aim to reduce wide-ranging symptoms, as well as to increase the client's level of function and quality of life.

### **Awareness of events**

36. As outlined above children's experiences with and in armed groups varies considerably. Programme designers and implementers need to be attuned to what armed groups such as ISIS are doing to children in order to effectively respond to their needs. For example some children in Syria have been exposed to extreme violence for over three years. During this time armed groups in Syria have forced children to sit in the front row of public tortures and executions and placed these acts onto CDs and pictures and distributed amongst them to purposefully reframe their thinking. This deep set physiological trauma of the children's experience needs to be carefully taken into account and countered in reintegration efforts. In this vein, rehabilitation philosophy is that these "clients" with complex problems are in need of multidisciplinary rehabilitation to treat all mental, physical, social and psychological problems in a holistic manner. A "treatment plan" should be based on inter-disciplinary team of psychologists, physicians, social counsellor and physiotherapist, education experts who know how to work with this group. The approach should aim to reduce the above-mentioned complex symptoms, as well as to increase the client's level of function and quality of life.

### **Mental health programming**

37. Programmes must promote the best interest of the child – not the best interests of that organization or the priorities of the donor. Currently there is a temptation and preference for some organisations and donors to claim that mental health and psychosocial support interventions should look a certain way. This one size fits all approach is not appropriate or effective in assisting children to come to terms with their experiences. Instead responses should factor in the varying experiences and symptoms of mental health in different cultures and contexts. Activities should take into account the age and the stage of development of the child or adolescent and accommodate the particular requirements of girls and boys. As such programmes require adequate time and a commitment of resources to necessitate a close and on-

going cooperation – this all requires long term vision, commitment and funding. Consequently the international response strategy is frequently one of avoidance due to the complexity and sensitivity of the issues not being compatible with the short-term nature of current programmes. Universal prevention approaches such as education and vocational skills training need psychological and emotional support. In addition sports programmes can be used to promote respect, discipline, self-control, feelings of belonging and self-esteem-not just as an add-on. Programmes should be run by animated, energetic and professionally trained practitioners from the local culture in order to build national capacity. Key to the success of these initiatives is sufficient time to be able to reintegrate children with their families and communities. There is no quick fix.

## **Location of intervention**

### **Release and reintegration**

38. In the midst of armed conflict, child release and reintegration processes are not linear. Consideration of the overall political, strategic, local security, social and economic contexts is vital for effective reintegration programme delivery. Programmers need to thoroughly assess the political and situational and consider whether the timing, conditions and tools are right for the situations. This analysis will demonstrate and support what interventions are appropriate and how long they are need for and should be conducted as a mandatory and routine activity for programmes. In addition, although high risk, the time consuming and expensive nature of child release and reintegration needs to be factored into programme design. Many raised the need for reintegration efforts to start prior to release. However, given that donors are growing restless of the expensive nature of release and reintegration programmes (as well as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)); any initiatives that are implemented should have a community approach, with access to all.

### **Access**

39. In many of the current programmes, especially those that focus on the concept of 'safe space', access to the children affected by armed violence is assumed. These initiatives assume that children are free to come to those running the programmes; however this is not always guaranteed. In many contexts in the Middle East, access to affected communities and child survivors are severely limited. It is therefore not surprising to find that Save the Children's programmatic adaptation, where it exists, is often small scale, ad hoc and short term. Thus the response strategy is frequently one of avoidance due to the complexity and sensitivity of the issues. Comprehensive, risk-aware, contextually-based strategies for reaching out to adolescent boys and girls, engaging with and influencing conservative communities, and advocating for changes in law and policies and practices of perpetrators of child rights violations are absent. Moreover, the in-country expertise required for monitoring of child rights in conflict situations, preventing and responding to trends of sexual violence, and providing specialised and appropriate psycho-social support services at scale, is often insufficient. Therefore, in order to assist children stuck in their situations, effective programmers need to understand the context, address the knowledge gaps and develop strategies based on comprehensive analysis of the political, social, economic and cultural context. These programmes should be informed by a gender analysis, deficits and weaknesses as well as opportunities, as well as the available and required capacities and resources. Here lessons about the efficiency and effectiveness of programmes need to be learnt and shared quickly so that capacity and expertise can be created within international organisations and the local people who are already responding.

### **Operating within the conflict theatre**

40. Most of the current release and reintegration programming are being conducted in challenging and complex armed conflict environments. This results in a host of political, security, legal, institutional and programming risks, and operational

challenges that need to be overcome in the context of prevention of child recruitment, including release and reintegration of children associated with armed groups and other conflict affected children. When working in these conditions it is important that programme implementers continue to affirm the commitment to pragmatic, but principled solutions based on International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law.

#### **Location of intervention**

41. Recovery and reintegration should take place in an environment that fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child. The widely held view is that children should be reunified with their families and communities as soon as possible since they hold the best resources for dealing with reintegration and rehabilitation. Nevertheless, there is a debate over whether to send child soldiers home as soon as family members are located and have expressed willingness to receive the child. In such a case, all support should ideally be channeled through the families and communities. However, others contend that there might be greater benefits to providing the former child combatant with a stable and protected interim environment within the demobilisation process, before family reunification. Both the needs of children and how ready the families and communities are to support and provide for these children need to be assessed to see which treatment environment would be the most appropriate.

#### **Rehabilitation centres**

42. The decision to implement a rehabilitation centre should be based on a careful assessment of the need for such services. Rehabilitation centres can provide a safe space, giving children time to break away from the command structure and lifestyle of the military environment. However, experience has shown that rehabilitation centres can often present weak or counter-productive aspects too. Sometimes these centers tend to develop 'institutional diseases' since they provide better living conditions and education and vocational training than those provided in the children's community of origin. There have been many cases of children refusing to be reunified with their families or communities in order to continue to benefit from the centres' care. They are also rarely established in rural areas and are very often too far away from the communities of reintegration of the children. This distance does not allow families to visit their children or become involved in the activities of the centre. In addition, traditional coping mechanisms such as the participation of traditional healers are rarely integrated into the activities of the center. Furthermore, some of these centers lack the expertise to conduct family tracing activities and often do not consider family reunification as their main priority of intervention. After completion of treatment in the centres, very little support is provided to prepare families to receive the children.

#### **Rehabilitation centres**

43. Due to the high running costs, facilities at rehabilitation centres can be inadequate, leading to poor hygiene or limited play grounds, and the sustainability of such centres cannot be secured over time. The staff are very often inadequately trained on child development, counseling or child rights issues. Nevertheless, in some cases, as demonstrated in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda, rehabilitation centres respond to acute need in terms of protecting the children during a sensitive transitory period. In comparison to foster families, there is less abuse and discrimination of the children in these centers. However, these centres can be easily targeted for forced recruitment or abduction of children. They can also act as a magnet and incentive for abducted or forcibly recruited children to escape and seek assistance; which is sometimes the only way to identify these children and to provide them with care and protection. They provide a secure environment to girls who have generally been sexually abused, as they need special support including community sensitization before reintegration in their community of origin. These centers allow the conduct of a proper assessment of the children's needs, in particular, their need for psychological support.

## **Community lead**

44. The use of outreach programmes is beneficial on both physiological and financial levels due to the integration of the community and the common use of volunteers. However these out programmes need to ensure that the needs of the primary caregivers are also addressed.

## **Extreme violence and violent extremism**

### **Issue of terminology**

45. In examinations and responses to the changing dynamics of conflict and fragility there has been debate in how this phenomenon is understood, interpreted and responded to. There has also been some discussion on how the issue should be termed, with 'violent extremism' being more commonly used in formal settings but a current preference of child protection actors to use 'extreme violence' which is seen as less subjective. The UN Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism notes that 'violent extremism' is not new, nor restricted to any particular region, nationality, system or belief. Western governments saw 9/11, as a threat to global security and economy. The ensuing designation of terrorism and the resulting push for work on preventing extreme violence has been problematic as it has ended up being a code word for certain groups who conform to certain ideologies. The lack of a universal agenda for counter terrorism is problematic, as each country has its own security agenda for countering violent extremism and preventing extreme violence. Although they are linked, there needs to be a "conscious uncoupling" of violent extremism and extreme violence to ensure appropriate responses are developed. Whilst violent extremism has garnered a certain cachet extreme violence has not. Shifting the focus to address extreme violence could be an effective preventative mechanism to ensuring that armed groups do not turn into conduits of violent extremism.

### **The importance of the narrative**

46. It is generally agreed that the issue of the twentieth century was race; some postulate that the issue of the current century is identity. The invention of new technologies and wide spread use of social media has provided a cheap and widely available platform for extremist groups to effectively spread their propaganda narrative. The success of this can clearly be seen by ISIS Jihadists in Syria who use Facebook, Youtube and Twitter to spread their ideology and activities as a means to radicalise and recruit people to their cause. By posting images and videos advertising the conditions and lifestyle of jihadists in Syria, such as the availability of western food and 'wives/husbands,' extremist groups are able to persuade vulnerable people, predominately youths who are questioning their identity, to join their cause. It is important to remember here that radicalisation does not always lead to violence; it can just result in more extreme views.

### **Counter narratives**

47. Western governments and Non-governmental organisations have started to use the same platforms to respond to extremist propaganda with limited success. Anti-West ideologies are firmly embossed in the narratives of extremist groups, especially Islamic groups. Consequently western government or non-governmental organisations engaging in counter narratives risk being seen as anti-Islamic. In fact previous success has come from allowing the local narrative to take hold. Developing counter narratives is very complex and tricky as an extensive knowledge of the topic is needed. Therefore specialists, such as religious leaders, should be used to assist in developing counter narratives and with de-radicalisation; however this needs to be conducted with caution and care. This engagement of religious leaders is an important but new area of opportunity yet there is a reluctance for political leaders to do so, as such the space to explore this is needed. In addition there is a concern that extremist groups' narrative such as ISIS's is not being contested enough. Some also argues that there is a mismatch between counter narrative that is being offered and our actions, such as



providing food in camps and not education. Whilst food is a basic necessity, being able to provide hope and opportunity are crucial.

## **Building partnerships**

### **Conversation gaps**

48. It often feels that donors are missing from the conversation. There needs to be more dialogue between donors and the political leadership, with whom these decisions lay. Within this restructuring room needs to be developed for key influencers, including local community leaders and religious leaders. It was also postulated that inviting donors to the field or field training would also assist in advocacy attempts to raise awareness of the context that implementers work in and the need for long-term sustained support.

### **Integrated approach**

49. The engagement with new groups and new actors, including the humanitarian, development and security sectors, can bring about new ways to negotiate and bring about the release of children. An awareness of other humanitarian, development or security sector actors' structures, mandates and priorities, alongside the provision of sustainable integrated models of training and doctrinal changes in their approach to children associated with armed forces and groups can better support and up hold actors individual efforts. The benefits of multi-sectoral approaches were also raised as a new way to address the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, particularly for extreme violence.

### **Cooperation**

50. In order to work effectively there is a need to promote a multi-sectoral approach, where all stakeholders work in close coordination as part of the development policy and programming responses. By working with the private sector, justice system, security reform, governance and development programmes and early warning systems are able to be established at all levels. Improving the links between international actors and national actors, particularly social workers, can create more leeway in negotiations with governments, who can feel more comfortable dealing with national actors. This cohesive approach facilitates the strengthening of effective case management systems and an improved tracking of results. Other areas of cooperation to develop are partnerships involving academic bodies or personal, such as the current partnership between UN University, UNICEF and Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) on tracking trajectories of children coming in and out of armed groups. The finding of these collaborations will inform more effective programme development.

### **Negotiations**

51. In negotiations it is important to be aware of who holds the power and push the right buttons. With this in mind initially appealing on the political level and to those in power's self-interest in a constructive manner can be the most effective method to encourage those in question to do the right thing. However, there needs to be limits on how far these attempts go. In addition if appealing to those in question's self-interest is not constructive, then punitive measures and international pressures need to be utilised, such as sanctions.

### **Existing resources**

52. Although there is a need for more resources, there is also room to improve the use of existing resources. The lack of connection between some of the projects results in efforts being run in parallel to each other, even within regional organisations such as the EU. Raising awareness of what others are doing in the same field is vital for advances in implementation. The suggestion of utilising a systems approach and developing MOUs with different NGOs to manage the implementation of tool sharing and advances in projects was explored as a means to yield greater success.

### **New partnerships**

53. In order to develop further understanding of the various drivers for the children in extreme violence landscape and how to mitigate them, there is a real need to collaborate with relevant experts. For example, the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative has developed a partnership with the domestic police, youth and local community in Canada for extreme violence prevention. Though still in development, this initiative for building connections has utilised what is already known about radicalisation, prevention and intervention; expert interviews as well as working with police; community stakeholders and partners; and youths to gather perspectives on policing; violence and radicalisation in the community. This thematic analysis has been employed to inform tool design and development and provide baseline data for monitoring and evaluation purposes. The tools are developed with the framework of being easy for everyone to use and can be implemented where time and money for training isn't readily available. Use of vulnerability to violent extremism risk indicators provide police with a structured guidance to assist in identifying people vulnerable to violent extremism which can be referred to in the form of an app or a report.

### **Technology**

54. The use of new technology in the Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers example above, in the form of an app, highlights the potential opportunities when partnering and utilising new technology. The importance of developing partnerships with technology and communications agencies and actors was deliberated and agreed on by all as an area of focus moving forward. Particular attention was paid to the need to cultivate partnerships and strategies to use media and communications network in the way that some extremist groups do to counter the narrative.

## **Support to host communities and social cohesion**

### **Early warning indicators**

55. The recruitment and use of children is a good early warning indicator for armed conflict. As such prevention work should look at the use of children as an early warning indicator and how resilience can be built within communities. Here indications of how local population have resisted the ideology and control of armed groups should be looked at to demonstrate successful strategies to mitigate the unique vulnerabilities of these communities in question.

### **Ground level partnerships**

56. Major rights movements have usually come about through people questioning the status quo. This is echoed in effectiveness of United Nations Security Council resolutions, whilst important steps, some argue that they make little difference at ground level. Therefore more attention and investment should be channelled through those on the ground whose communities and children are directly affected. Additionally, efforts should be made to identifying opportunities to connect better and close the gap between the Special Representative level and those at ground level.

### **Roles and capacity building**

57. There is a need to build the capacity within the host communities; this involves focusing on education before, during and in the aftermath of conflict and building the capacity of women who often are the pillars of the local community during times of crisis. The international community should unapologetically focus on building the capacity of women as they are the figures who are often left to rebuild communities after conflict. In addition the existence of an 'echo chamber' where resilience and reintegration messages are shared is important in the strengthening of the local community. However it is important to trust the local population to decide, address and lead the needs of the children in their community, not just in partnerships with international organisations. Populations are not just recipients of aid they are also the drivers for change.

## **Governments, international organisations, security sector**

### **United Nations**

58. The Security Council has made nascent efforts within the existing framework, such as the inclusion of an operation paragraph for children in extreme violence in resolution 2225, the naming and shaming approach which has secured the release of many children and the call for a Secretary General report on the detention of children. Although these initiatives will advance the children in armed conflict agenda there are limitations to implementing changes on the ground. Armed groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army and Boko Haram are difficult to engage and flaunt their disregard of international child protection standards. The United Nations needs to assess the limitations of current initiatives and address the gap between mechanisms and the resolutions to ensure the resolutions and protection of children in armed conflict is felt on the ground. Using other United Nations agendas such as human trafficking in conflict (December 2015) and healthcare in conflict (May 2016) as opportunities to advance the protection of children in armed conflict from a new angle.

### **States**

59. One of the prominent problems is the politicisation of the issue and the continued selective manner in which governments apply standards and frameworks relating to children and extreme violence. This selective manner is evidenced by the growing trend in the detention of children by states. States have a responsibility to respect and ensure the respect of international law; they cannot shift this responsibility when dealing with armed groups and violent extremism. To ensure that this responsibility is upheld states need to be held accountable for their actions and capacity needs to be built within government ministries. Capacity also needs to be built in a number of vital areas e.g. child protection and social welfare as well as security sector reform and detention procedures; this is an area which international actors can assist governments with and should push for more focus on.

### **Donors**

60. Currently there is some tension surrounding the requirements donors attach to their funding. This stems from a tendency for funding to come with requirement that it is used for 'countering violent extremism' and 'preventing violent extremism'. There is a need to be clear about what support is needed and push back on donor dictated conditions in favour of funding for child rights and child protection.

### **Security forces**

61. Currently there is no doctrinal framework or training for the military on strategies of how to deal with and engage with children who are/have been associated with armed forces or group. Therefore there is a need to mitigate the impacts upon military personnel, this includes removing and preventing military personnel being confronted with child soldiers in the field and have to resort to force. The development of a set of guidelines outlining how security forces should deal with children in armed conflict, alongside the implementation of mandatory training would assist this. In addition practical and field focused training on how to deescalate scenarios when faced with children who are with armed forces or groups should also be implemented.

### **Field response**

62. With the changing nature of conflict the issue of how those in the field respond is ambiguous. Currently mandates are not clearly defined; there is no security or armed force in the world that has a doctrine or guidelines on how to deal with child soldiers when they are confronted by them in a conflict theatre. In addition there is no action plan or framework to guide the international community to deal with children in extreme violence and assist coalition forces in seeking accountability from all the groups involved.

## **Interactions with armed groups: should we interact with them**

### **Engagement**

63. Actors who expose children to extreme violence do not abide by international norms. They are therefore difficult to engage through the normal avenues such as UN resolutions. Nevertheless by referring to the armed groups as non-state actors we make the assumption that they do not want to interact in a state format. However some, such as the Islamic State and Al-Shabaab do act in state-like ways. Bearing this in mind could open up new avenues to engage with extremist groups and put an end to the use of children in armed conflict could be developed. Nonetheless there is a need to be careful that engagement with armed groups is not perceived as legitimising their 'organisation.'

### **Impunity**

64. The assumption of guaranteed impunity for those armed groups using children in extreme violence is postulated as a driver for their continued use. Whilst the referral of cases to the International Criminal Court is vital to counter impunity, how these trials and prosecutions are handled is problematic. There is a need to ensure that the threat of prosecution does not result in making armed groups more abusive of children.

### **Political responses**

65. Quicker and more effective responses to conflict are crucial as violent extremist groups are rarely there at the beginning of conflict. Security responses can lead to abuses by governments and the discrimination of individuals rather than targeting groups that exacerbate violent extremism. Instead positive citizen-state relationships need to be promoted which give citizens access to government.

### **Communication**

66. Armed groups are utilising cyber space at an unprecedented level to not only recruit soldiers but to spread their extremism and hate. We should be able to have a positive counter narrative to the propaganda distributed by the armed groups. It is important for government policy makers, UN system, NGOs and donors to understand that semantics matter and the language we use can be counter-productive.

## **Funding/resources**

### **Funding cycles**

67. At present it takes a minimum of 10-12 months for donors to provide money. Generally this money is for one off short term programmes constituting one funding cycle. The short-term nature of the current funding cycles is dangerous as more harm than good can be caused by starting programmes that cannot be sustained. Engaging children and providing them with support only to take it away is disruptive and can have disastrous effects. Consequently there is a need to be proactive, educate donors and move to a multi-year funding model so that organisations can plan for the long-term. The UK government is investigating the plausibility and effectiveness of this with the CSSF fund, which is a blended ODA and non-ODA fund and has a higher risk appetite.

### **Business case**

68. To ensure a more stable and forth coming funding stream it was agreed that a business case demonstrating the value of the money needs to be built. With an illustration of how the donation will affect the region in question including GDP and the potential return on investment, donors would be more inclined to invest on a long term bases. However in order to build business cases for funding, more data is needed.

### **Advocacy**

69. There is a desire by governments to look at how funding can be used in a broader manner as well as support in a programmatic way. However there are challenges to this with funds such as whether to pay attention to the issue via country or thematic focus. International advocacy on what would assist in streamlining the funding process

would inform governments of how to navigate this issue. The development of key allies in certain donors and member states would not only enable an understanding of what does their funding and budgeting look like to inform better advocacy attempts. It would also enable those seeking funding to develop a strategy to successfully work within funders framework.

### **Resource mobilisation and management capacity**

70. Implementers routinely experience constraints in resource and programme implementation between release and reintegration programmes. However, despite apparent awareness and acceptance by funders of the need for long-term funding the majority of funds available are for less than a year which can disrupt resource mobilisation and management. In addition the work of UN agencies and NGOs in the field is often fragmented and in competition with each other for resources. The disconnect and lack of coordination amongst field actors can lead to a risk of actors spreading themselves and their resources too thinly. Consequently capacity needs to be built within practitioners to assist with developing more coordinate responses and management of resources including sharing resources in the field. Thus a thorough examination of how resources are used and should be would be beneficial for developing best practices. Also the development of a community of practice through an increase in information sharing between practitioners and policy makers would assist with resource mobilisation and management capacity.

## **Advocacy**

### **National level**

71. Advocacy needs to be focused on continuing the pressure on national authorities and political elites to uphold international rights especially children's rights. Within this effort attention should be paid to developing a national legislator and working with different facets of power, particularly different branches of government.

### **International level**

72. Advocacy at the United National level needs to place more emphasis on children, their rights and their intrinsic needs. In addition UN member states should continue to work on building strategies and agendas to help raise awareness and good practices. Within these efforts increased coherence and understanding of collaboration around CAAC issues should be prioritised.

### **Moving forward**

73. There is a need to re-assess the communication and collaboration strategies and who is involves. Currently, a number of member states are missing from the discussions, these actors, especially the non-traditional member states, need to be brought into and engage with the conversations occurring in this space.

## **Moving forward**

### **Long term and short term work**

74. It was agreed that there is a large body of work and commitment of resources to policy but the next step is to translate this into more robust actions. There is a need to focus on innovative ideas to translate the programmes and products in the field. These should include methods to make organisations work lighter, with lighter footprints, whilst also making it sustainable. Whilst all of these suggestions are achievable they will require time to affect the necessary change. Thus advocacy around the need for long term funding support should bear this in mind.

### **Programme guidance and experience**

75. The Field Handbook on Child Recruitment, Release and Reintegration (working title) currently being compiled will seek to provide general guidance that will be appropriate to situations of extreme violence. It will offer support for practitioners and policies to identify and implement appropriate and effective interventions for children and



communities affected by extreme violence. The compendium of reintegration lessons and experiences that Save The Children are leading on will be complementary to the handbook. To ensure the development of good programme guidance and good programming the inclusion of lessons from elsewhere and collaborations with other sectors such as security, technology and innovation bodies as well as local communities would be useful to create a holistic approach. Nonetheless constant analysis, evaluation and, if necessary, adaption of the guidance frameworks, programmes and tools is required alongside situational analysis to ensure that they remain appropriate and effective.

### **Prevention**

76. To effectively address the issue of children in extreme violence there needs to be an increased focus on strengthening prevention efforts and frameworks rather than reintegration efforts. These efforts should focus on building entry points through the three building blocks of religious leaders, educators and local actors to enable the best response to spreading messages supporting prevention.

### **Release and reintegration**

77. Whilst novel interventions and strategies are currently being used with some success, what release and reintegration actually mean in the current environment, whether it is in conflict situations or not, needs to be understood. In order to better prepare and improve response programmes and tools available context analysis is required to improve understanding of push and pull factors for children and release scenarios eg the manner in which children become disassociated. Furthermore in order to provide release and reintegration services adequate investment in the workforce and necessary resources is essential.

### **Capacity building**

78. There was much emphasis on the importance of having the correct, qualified personnel working on child protection programmes. The need for better expertise in qualified and appropriate MHPSS personnel and training was highlighted as a key aspect which requires attention. However in order to effectively achieve this capacity needs to be built within practitioners. Therefore a focus of funds, resources and time on how to build the capacity of staff is required.

### **Designation of roles**

79. Currently the various actors that work on issues related to protecting children from extreme violence tend to work in siloes leading to overlapping of efforts and the stretching of resources. Whether within child protection or across other humanitarian and development sectors (education, Livelihoods/FSL, etc.) agencies need to be better at sharing experiences and tools. The development of a 'community of practice' based on the sharing of information and tools as well as notifying each other of actions and research findings would assist in developing effective coordinated responses to the use of children in extreme violence. However for this to successfully occur, a designation of roles is need with a clear convener.

### **Political momentum**

80. There is an opportunity to seize the opportunity and momentum created around the 10th anniversary year of the Paris Principle on Children Associated with Armed Groups to renew political efforts and drive forward the recommendations of this conference.

### **Natasha Hosford**

Wilton Park | March 2017

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