GLOBAL COALITION
FOR REINTEGRATION OF CHILD SOLDIERS

Reframing Child Reintegration:

From humanitarian action to development, prevention, peacebuilding and beyond

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CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CAAFAG   -   Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups

CAAC   -   Children and Armed Conflict

CCA   -   Common Country Analysis

HDP/N   -   Humanitarian, Development and Peace / Nexus

HRP   -   Humanitarian Response Plan

IDDRS   -   Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards

ILO   -   International Labour Organisation

NGO   -   Non-Governmental Organisation

OECD   -   Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OSRSG CAAC   Office of the Special Representative for the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

SDGs   -   Sustainable Development Goals

UN   -   United Nations

UNICEF   -   United Nations Children's Fund

UNSDCF   -   United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

PREFACE

This paper, "*Reframing Child Reintegration: From humanitarian action to development, prevention, peacebuilding and beyond,*" is prepared by the Expert Advisory Group of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers. The Global Coalition – an alliance of Member States, United Nations (UN) agencies, the World Bank, non-government organizations and academia – was launched in 2018 to advance the global need for reintegration of former child soldiers and prompt action to increase children's access to sustainable, long-term support. It is co-chaired by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The Reframing Child Reintegration paper is part of a larger endeavour to better understand the role of child reintegration to generate broader and more predictable support to enable all children emerging from armed forces or groups to access the short-, medium- and long-term services they need to reintegrate to society and contribute to a lasting peace.

The Reframing Child Reintegration briefing paper complements, and is presented in conjunction with two other briefing papers which analyse the gaps and needs in contemporary child reintegration and the funding modalities and mechanisms to address them.

This paper considers the centrality of child reintegration within overall sustainable development, peacebuilding, sustaining peace and conflict prevention efforts. It explores how affected children could be better supported to fully realise their rights as agents of positive change and champions for social and economic development. The paper looks at the role of child reintegration to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). It highlights the need for longer term support for children formerly associated with armed forces and groups, through a focus on the SDGs that extends beyond humanitarian assistance towards pro-active interventions across the Humanitarian Development Peace (HDP) nexus, that mitigate the drivers of conflict, reduce risk, and strengthen the resilience of individuals and societies.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All children have the right to be protected from abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect.[1] Yet violence against children remains at unacceptable levels globally, with the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups among the most egregious violations of their rights. The vulnerability of children to recruitment and use is a massive, under-recognized and under-reported barrier to child survival and development. The physical, emotional and cognitive growth of a child – and policies that support children to reach their full potential – are crucial both to maximize the future capabilities of these children and the future prospects of societies. Reintegrating formerly associated children is a unique opportunity; and essential to equitable and inclusive societies, social cohesion, democracy, and economic and productivity gains.

Traditionally, responsibility for reintegration programming for Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) has fallen largely to the humanitarian community alone. Resources were limited to humanitarian funding baskets, which are not sufficient either in amount, duration or flexibility to support children beyond an initial package of support that does little to build on the strengths, or address the core vulnerabilities, of the children and their families in the long term. Traditionally, the release and reintegration of children has often been treated as a set of sequential steps in response to the needs of a quantitative caseload of children released through a formal process. However, many children exiting armed forces and groups today do not experience this reality. Sustainable child reintegration therefore requires far broader support and a longer-term vision that brings together a multiplicity of stakeholders and sectors across the humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and prevention domains.

The successful reintegration of CAAFAG requires a long-term, multi-stakeholder approach that bridges the nexus of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities. It is central to overall prosperity and peace in conflict-affected societies and it is critical that governments account for the reintegration and protection of CAAFAG when designing and implementing national programming towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Reintegration must be well resourced and nationally owned so that programming that is tailored to the needs of former child soldiers and contributes to strengthening the wider protective environment for all.

A significant proportion of the United Nation's (UN) peace and security budget is spent on the containment of armed conflict, while scope to address the drivers of armed conflict and prevent it from occurring in the first place is limited. Preventive programming requires stakeholders to strengthen the mechanisms that state and non-state actors need to commit, cooperate and coordinate along peaceful pathways. If the cycle of conflict is not broken, grievances that drive conflict will remain unaddressed and the dynamics of protracted conflict will continue. It is a shared responsibility – from prevention to post-conflict recovery and reconstruction – before, during and after conflict.[2] There are many areas of overlap between child reintegration, development, peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Investment in local structures and civil society is crucial to increasing resilience and reducing dependency on external actors over time while also addressing the ongoing needs of children affected by armed conflict. In protracted armed conflict, humanitarian response and development interventions are intended to coexist as a continuum without compromising humanitarian principles and can be a model to learn from when bringing more actors into reintegration work.

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1 Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 3; and SDG Target 16.2
https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx
2 https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_262.pdf
https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12340.doc.htm

[The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and other global initiatives focus attention on, and are aimed at, sustainable peace and development through coordinated, coherent and concerted investment and actions.[3] The SDGs provide for a harmonized way of working so that interventions not only meet the needs of those affected, but also reduce risks and vulnerabilities. All 17 SDGs relate directly to the lives of children and are relevant to CAAFAG – and other children affected by armed conflict – and provide a platform for collective action. In adopting the SDGs, governments agreed to end the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups by 2030 (Target 8.7).[4] The 2030 Agenda asserts the inextricable link between human rights, peace and development, which also underpins the core concepts of this paper.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an important entry point to reframe the issue of child reintegration and address some of the shortcomings of current child reintegration programmes: it involves development and a range of other actors besides humanitarians; it has a longer time horizon; it has an integrated, comprehensive and holistic approach, which includes various sectors, including education, health care and livelihoods; it is predicated on "leaving no one behind;" and it allows a focus on prevention by addressing some of the main drivers, such as inequalities, lack of jobs, poor natural resource management and corruption.

The 2030 Agenda provides national governments and the international community with a framework for improving the peace and prosperity of citizens. Both the 2030 Agenda and the UN's sustaining peace resolutions emphasize the importance of partnerships with civil society, the private sector, regional and sub-regional organizations and local actors in a new, coherent framework of engagement.[5] The sustaining peace agenda stresses the need to scale-up innovations across the international community, recognizing the importance of development, humanitarian and peacebuilding approaches to preventing conflict. The UN and the World Bank emphasize the need to improve peacebuilding and sustaining peace as a means to restore confidence in the power of conflict-affected states.[6] Recognizing the primacy of agency mandates, sustaining peace is an essential goal to which all stakeholders can contribute.[7]

While reintegration services should always give CAAFAG access to individualized support through case management and care plans, longer-term reintegration must be embedded within work that supports the broader protective environment for children. As such, the norm is to support and enable inclusive, community-based reintegration programming, where the child is seen and served in the context of the community into which he or she will return or settle; and assistance to the child is enmeshed into assistance for the community as a whole. Reintegration that not only responds to, but proactively and successfully *prevents,* vulnerability is embedded within a protective environment in which parents, families, communities, local and sub-national authorities and governments all contribute to the care and protection of children. Holistic and inclusive interventions benefit *all* children, reducing stigma and division, and promoting an environment where young people are stakeholders in their own rehabilitation and recovery.[8]

Only through coordinated, concerted and sustained action can child reintegration be comprehensively provided for these children and their communities. It will also necessitate an 'all of UN' and 'all of society' approach to be successful and prevent future occurrences of child recruitment.

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3 https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment

4 "Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict", O'Neil, S. and Van Broeckhoven, K. (eds.), UN University http://collections.unu.edu/view/UNU:6409

5 https://undocs.org/A/72/684 https://undocs.org/en/E/2018/7

6 https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/publication/pathways-for-peace-inclusive-approaches-to-preventing-violent-conflict

7 https://undocs.org/a/72/707

8 UN Youth Strategy 2030 https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-un/

1.   INTRODUCTION

Children and young people are a force for change and renewal; they have the potential to make positive contributions to society and galvanize processes for peace and development. The successful reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) is essential to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in conflict-affected countries, yet approaches to child reintegration are not always as effective and sustainable as they could be.

Moreover, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a very useful framework to reframe child reintegration by asking for a comprehensive approach, having a longer term perspective and reducing vulnerabilities.

This paper *reframes* reintegration by situating it within a better-funded, longer-term, more sustainable approach to reintegration by a wider range of stakeholders across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus. It recognizes the centrality of reintegration to the SDGs – and the SDGs to reintegration – and the ability of conflict-affected countries to prevent children experiencing harm in the future.

Child reintegration has evolved markedly in recent decades with many actors working hard to improve the lives of children who have been recruited or otherwise involved with parties to conflict. Approaches to reintegration have tried to keep pace and adapt to the evolving characteristics of armed conflict around the world – including where children have separated from armed groups informally rather than through formal demobilization processes – with the vision of providing tailored reintegration support within a broader framework of strengthening the overarching protective environment for all. However, reintegration programming is too often limited by the resources made available for it, leading to implementation over too short a timeframe to fully address the conditions and drivers that put children at risk.[9]

There are varying success criteria employed by both national and international stakeholders for how child reintegration is measured. These success criteria are often focused on the static outputs generated within a project cycle, and focusing on these does not help address preventive issues related to the root causes of child recruitment and use. Successful reintegration requires a multi-sectoral, multi-dimensional approach rooted firmly in a gradual increase in responsibility and accountability among national counterparts over time, across the SDG and HDP domains. Although the importance of framing child reintegration within a longer-term, systems-strengthening approach is broadly acknowledged, efforts are often hamstrung by institutional mandates, short funding and programme cycles, and lack of a deep contextual political economy analysis. Not addressing root causes collectively and sustainably – or merely addressing the effect and not the cause – is unlikely to mitigate risk going forward.

Furthermore, while the current policy and practice landscape encourages a shared partner approach, the full efficacy of coordination and partnership can sometimes be thwarted by agency-specific mandates. This paper suggests a need to build on the emerging body of practice coming from the field with respect to reframing how actors work across sectors and the HDP nexus.

A theory of change for reframing reintegration shows that for a focus on CAAFAG to be efficient, effective and sustainable, institutional links with other sectors need to be made at the project inception phase so that coordination and referrals with other sectors continue once specific reintegration

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9 "Gaps and Needs of Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups' Successful Reintegration", Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers, 2019

programming is over. This is the shared opportunity and risk approach where opportunities and risks across sectoral divides must be tackled in a concerted manner.

This paper stresses the importance of child reintegration as a strategic intervention and investment *across all domains* for governments, donors and agencies in the work currently being done, and in terms of longer-term development, peace and the attainment of the SDGs. Paying attention to, and assisting, this specific cohort of children affected by armed conflict is a compelling opportunity that adds strategic value to achieving collective outcomes. In contrast, not doing so is likely to present a shared risk, with the cost of inaction being significant.[10]

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a universal, multi-stakeholder, multi-sector blueprint adopted by all UN Member States in 2015. The Agenda includes 17 SDGs covering poverty, food security, education, health care, justice and peace for which strategies, policies and plans should be developed at the national level and against which progress should be measured. The SDGs are inclusive and underscored by the core tenet of "leaving no-one behind," with Target 8.7 making specific reference to ending the recruitment and use of children in conflict. Understanding the contribution of child reintegration to attaining the SDGs is key and should be a collective concern led where possible by national governments or local authorities that limits reliance on exogenous intervention.[11]
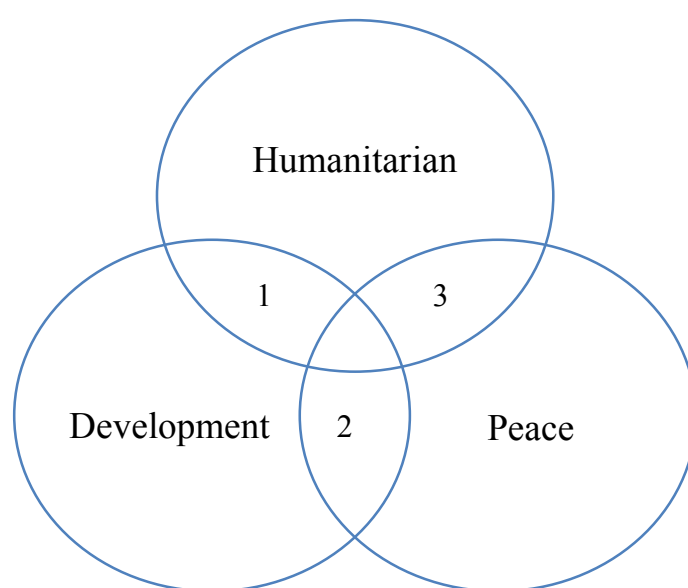
With this overarching rubric, the paper examines the importance of child reintegration for each of the humanitarian, development and peace domains (see overlaps 1-3 in the diagram above) and recognizes that the success of each domain is dependent in part on the performance of the others. It suggests that reintegration cannot be successful without cooperation and coordination among a diversity of actors, with particular regard to planning, partnerships and joint accountabilities. Reframing reintegration requires an 'all of society' approach by international and national, public and private sector stakeholders, along a continuum of support, in the immediate-, medium- and long-term.

In order to position the reframing discussion, the paper briefly introduces the issue of children's recruitment and use by armed forces and groups, and gives a brief overview of the evolution of child reintegration to date.

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10 World Development Report 2014, World Bank, Chapter 1, p.53 https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/16092
11 https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment

2. THE RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN

For the purpose of this paper it is emphasized that the term "child soldier," where used, refers to the Paris Principles definition of all children associated with armed forces and armed groups (see text box to the right).[12] Additionally, the terms "armed forces" and "armed groups" are used interchangeably without distinction between state and non-state entities or level of organisation.

> "A child associated with an armed force or armed group" refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purpose. [The Paris Principles, Article 2.1]

All children have the right to be protected from recruitment and use by armed forces and groups.[13] The development of a child – and the ability of a child reach this potential – is paramount to their future capabilities and the future prospects of societies. Investing in the reintegration of CAAFAG is fundamental, not only for these children to realize their rights, but also as a key to peace and development of a country. It is essential to equitable and inclusive societies, social cohesion, democracy, and economic and productivity gains.

However, millions of children around the world continue to experience harm, with the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups being one of the most egregious violations of their rights. Despite being explicitly forbidden under international law, the involvement of girls and boys in armed forces or groups remains a serious concern across the globe.[14]

The recruitment and use of children exposes them to serious harm that can cause life-long damage to their physical and psychological health. There are also challenges for children upon their release – reforming identities and social roles within a civilian rather than military framework, and adjusting to life in communities that are also likely to have been affected by the armed conflict and may also have experienced change.

3. EVOLUTION OF REINTEGRATION

3.1   One Size Fits None: Traditional approaches to reintegration

In recent decades, the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards and The Paris Principles have set clear policy for a child-centred, qualitative approach to child reintegration;

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12 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, 2000, Articles 1 & 2 https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/tools-for-action/optional-protocol/; and The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or armed groups, February 2007, Definitions, p.7 https://www.refworld.org/docid/465198442.html
13 Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), Article 3 and Article 6 https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx
14 *See Annex 1: Legal Framework

including the consideration of child-related issues in peace processes.[15] However, the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers makes reference to the fact that putting policy into practice has not always been possible due to a combination of financial and programmatic limitations.[16] In practice, the release and reintegration of children has often been limited to a set of sequential steps responsive to the needs of a quantitative caseload of children upon their release through formal demobilization processes. This is a somewhat linear process where CAAFAG are assisted with their return to civilian life through immediate- to medium-term care plans and a suite of programming that may include family tracing, alternative care, re-enrollment in school, catch-up education, vocational training and/or psychosocial support packages; which, though necessary, is not enough to ensure longer-term development, peace and prevention outcomes.

> "Child Reintegration" is the process through which children transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation. Sustainable reintegration is achieved when the political, legal, economic and social conditions needed for children to maintain life, livelihood and dignity have been secured. This process aims to ensure that children can access their rights, including formal and non-formal education, family unity, dignified livelihoods and safety from harm. [The Paris Principles, Article 2.8]

While policy-makers and practitioners have long recognized the need to adopt a more ambitious vision for child reintegration, *translating policy into practice has been hindered in part by limited funds, inflexible financing models, agency mandates and the challenge of establishing national or local ownership*. As the Global Coalition notes in its paper on gaps and needs in reintegration, research by War Child UK in 2018 found that funding of US $22.1 million for child reintegration in 2012 fell by 33 percent to $14.7 million in 2016, while the need increased significantly.[17] One of the more pressing challenges is that funding for child reintegration tends to fall solely to the international humanitarian community and to humanitarian funding pools. This means that the length of reintegration programmes can be as little as 12 months, usually less, which is not long enough to fully address the core vulnerabilities of children or contribute to preventing recruitment in the future.[18] Many governments do not allocate the necessary funding to reintegrate child soldiers or to prevent recruitment from happening. National and public sector actors in these environments can be unwilling to respond to the needs of this cohort, especially where children are perceived less as children, and more as criminals or perpetrators.

Overall, costing for reintegration is challenging. The costs of reintegration services vary between countries and regions, and it is often unclear how many children will need support in any given context. There may be a reluctance among children and their families to openly discuss association, and humanitarian actors may have limited qualitative information on which to plan the assistance given. There are also variances for individual children during each year of reintegration, and there may be new participants year on year. Reintegration programmes increasingly occur in the midst of ongoing conflicts, making it hard to predict challenges over time.[19]

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15 Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), 2006, Chapter 5.30 Children and DDR, p.213-222 https://www.unddr.org/iddrs.aspx ; and The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or armed groups, 2007 https://www.refworld.org/docid/465198442.html

16 "Gaps and Needs of Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups' Successful Reintegration", Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers, 2019

17 "Closing the funding gap for the reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups", September 2018, (in) "Rethink Child Soldiers: A New Approach to the Reintegration of All Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups", 2019, War Child UK https://www.warchild.org.uk/sites/default/files/link-files/War_Child_UK_Rethink_Child_Soldiers_Report_Final.pdf

18 "Gaps and Needs of Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups' Successful Reintegration", Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers, 2019

19 Ibid.

As the Global Coalition recognises in its paper *Gaps and Needs of Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups' Successful Reintegration*, funding limitations are coupled with programme challenges.[20] In this sense, the traditional demobilization and reintegration template is increasingly outdated in many contexts. Many children today do not experience the formal release and reintegration narrative. Unlike Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration for adults, the release of children is not contingent on a formal peace process, and many children disengage from armed forces and groups as soon as they can be released, through a series of inter-related physical and psychological processes. All of which call for an expanded approach to reintegration that includes community members, women and other at-risk youth.[21] The linear construct of release and reintegration does not do enough to address children's socio-economic circumstances or core vulnerabilities, and does not mitigate the cycle of conflict that put them at risk in the first instance. It takes only limited consideration of the services needed for children who do not exit through formal release processes. These children return directly to communities – which may not necessarily be their original communities – and they need to access services and support without being identified as having been associated as the stigma of such an association may prevent their full reintegration. This requires significant investment across stakeholders and sectors alongth the reintegration process, and as has been noted, is rarely sufficiently resourced.

3.2   Children in a Changing World: The shifting nature of armed conflict

Many conflict-affected states face cycles of repeated violence, weak governance and instability, with the majority of violent conflict today occurring in countries that have experienced violent conflict in the past.[22] More than half of all states affected by ongoing violence are seeing protracted armed conflict persisting for more than ten years. This is fuelled by a multiplicity of drivers – including limited economic opportunity, unemployment, inequity, social justice and grievance – that if not addressed at the source, leave a likelihood of violence recurring. Children whose trajectories into armed groups are largely determined by such factors, could fall into a cycle of unmet needs and return to armed forces or groups in the future.

Recent decades have seen a growing prevalence in the number of armed groups that commit terrorist acts.[23] Contemporary discourse highlights the plight of children involved with these groups, especially when the language of terrorism and policy for "countering violent extremism" tends towards the prosecution of the children involved in it.[24] Counterterrorism policy often promotes a law enforcement, rather than rehabilitative approach, and when they do adopt a development discourse, they often fail to use rights-base language that puts children at the centre and recognize that children recruited and used by armed groups are subject to coercion and human rights violations.

Child reintegration must be repositioned as responsive to the multi-causal ecology of why children are recruited and what are their experiences in armed groups. It leads to a broad palette of post-conflict dividends, especially its contribution to development, peacebuilding and peace sustaining outcomes. If child reintegration is to contribute effectively to the transition from war to peace, it must be viewed as an indivisible continuum along which children are assisted with their transition to civilian life as agents of change, building their skills and increasing social capital. This contemporary approach to

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20 Ibid.
21 "Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict", O'Neil, S. and Van Broeckhoven, K. (eds.), UN University; Chapter 3, p.85
22 World Development Report 2011, World Bank https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/4389
23 Security Council resolution 2427 (2018) http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/2427
24 Note there is no internationally agreed definition of the term 'violent extremism'.

reintegration – *where reintegration is framed as a component of the broader child protection system through the prism of the SDGs* – is more inclusive, more comprehensive and longer-term – and has the potential to offer a higher return on investment in the end.

4. REFRAMING REINTEGRATION

The recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups is a significant barrier to child survival and development. The physical, emotional and cognitive growth of a child, and the ability of a child to reach his or her full potential, is paramount to their future capabilities and the future prospects of societies. Childhood is a unique opportunity. Investing in children is fundamental to ensuring the realization of children's rights and is central to the future development of a country. It is essential to equitable and inclusive societies, social cohesion, democracy, and economic and productivity gains.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a very useful framework to reframe reintegration and address some of the shortcomings that have emerged in the reintegration of former child soldiers. The SDGs ask for a comprehensive approach, which includes several aspects of child reintegration programmes, including education, health care, livelihoods and jobs. The SDGs also give the opportunity to lengthen the time horizon for reintegration and prevent re-recruitment and address vulnerabilities and drivers of recruitment and violent conflicts, such as inequalities, poor natural resource management and corruption.

The degree to which a country is successful in reintegrating children and providing livelihoods and security for former child soldiers directly affects its ability to foster political stability and social and economic recovery. Reintegration requires the principal stakeholders to have the political will to support and achieve a lasting peace, ideally with national governments leading on policy decisions and demonstrating commitment through direct involvement.

While the successful reintegration of CAAFAG presents an exceptional opportunity, the cost of *not* doing so may also be significant. The World Bank draws attention to the limited progress made in managing risk in recent years, calling into question the capacity of the global community to foster collective action among national governments and other stakeholders. This collective inaction can be applied to the issue of child reintegration, and poses challenges to the goals that national governments and the international community may have agreed upon, from eliminating poverty to restoring peace, building resilience and prosperity, and achieving a more equitable distribution of income. More ambitious and coordinated efforts are necessary to ensure that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.[25]

Achieving this demands a multi-agency, multi-sector approach to strengthening the capacities of existing organisational structures that together provide former child soldiers with access to opportunity. Because of the massive scope of reintegration, it is often heavy on resources and requires concerted external support from donors, the private sector and implementing agencies, but ultimately reintegration programming must be oriented in a way that is sustainable and integrated to existing domestic systems, and plans for the eventual withdrawal of outside help. Reintegration is a process, but arguably sustainable peace will not be achieved until states, communities and families are able to provide a protective environment for all war-affected children, protecting their rights as minors, celebrating their inherent worth, acknowledging their social capital and reducing their vulnerability to future conflict and recruitment. Supporting reintegration is part of and contributes to that aim.

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25 World Development Report 2014, World Bank, Chapter 8, p.269 https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/16092

The success or failure of reintegration can have a considerable effect on the overall post-war peace dividend. Reintegration must protect children, and recognize that protection in the longer term is manifested in safety, opportunity and choice. Helping former child soldiers grow and develop to their full potential and participate and contribute meaningfully as citizens and stakeholders in their own rehabilitation and recovery is a strategic intervention for all actors working towards breaking the cycle of violence, creating stable societies and supporting countries meet their development targets. It is incumbent upon all players to coordinate efforts and overcome bureaucratic impediments in order to put the child at the centre of their actions.

Reintegrating children calls for a strategy that bridges the divide between humanitarian response and longer-term development and peacebuilding work, without compromise to humanitarian principles. It requires states and the international community acknowledge former child soldiers as a specific cadre of children, addressing their needs as central to attaining peace and development dividends. Such an ambition requires UN actors, the government, donors and NGOs working together in a concerted manner to provide the continual support that children and their communities need.

Reframing reintegration draws attention to the three interconnected areas that cover the HDP nexus, and recognizes that the success of each domain is dependent in part on the performance of the others, across all of society by a wide range of public and private sector stakeholders across research, policy and practice. Reframing reintegration is a call for governments, local authorities, donors, the UN, NGOs and other stakeholders to identify what can be done to merge comparative advantages to benefit these children. It suggests a need to delineate institutional theories of change and *identify commonalities and collective outcomes to better plan for joint success*. **Reintegrating child soldiers is a strategic investment for governments, donors and agencies**, building on the gains already made and rethinking how reintegration contributes towards sustainable development and more robust peace and stability.

Reframing reintegration also calls for *developing methods for measuring success*. Gauging the success of child reintegration will require recalibration of existing sectoral metrics; building on what works but looking increasingly at the "handshakes" or touch-points between the humanitarian, development and peace domains. Measuring the success of reintegration will require a combination of qualitative, proxy indicators that measure intangibles (e.g. the notion of being "reintegrated"), and process and performance indicators that look at the system. One important indicator could be to compare the SDG indicators for the children that are reintegrated with the national (or sub-national) average to ensure that they should not fare worse.

Any strategy aimed at preventing the recruitment of children requires an understanding of the reasons behind recruitment and demands both proactive and reactive intervention. Reactive steps involve responding immediately to reports of recruitment and ensuring that children who have been released from armed groups have access to reintegration programming to help them in the transition to civilian life. Pro-active prevention of recruitment and re-recruitment is inseparable from the wider policy framework supporting reintegration. Reintegration requires the principal stakeholders – national governments, local authorities, national and international organizations – to have political and economic incentives to support and achieve a lasting peace, ideally with national governments leading on policy decisions and demonstrating commitment through direct involvement.

Key elements of "reframing" reintegration

✓ Comprehensive, long-term approach based on SDGs

✓ Multi-year, predictable funding

✓ Bridges the humanitarian, development and peace nexus

✓ Broad range of public and private sector stakeholders across research, policy and practice

✓ Expands assistance to a longer timeframe as needed

✓ Use plans, strategies and policies to reach the SDGs by 2030 to provide

Figure: Key elements of reframing reintegration

4.1   A protective environment for children

Responding to and preventing child recruitment are part of the same cycle. Protecting children calls for an overarching system that not only addresses the needs of those that have already experienced harm, but limits exposure to risk, reduces vulnerability and builds resilience. This includes increasing standards of living, reducing inequalities, making risk reduction more effective and changing the underlying system structure to allow children and their caregivers to change their relationship to the system. Child reintegration should be embedded within a wider framework of longer-term systems-strengthening at all levels from the individual to the state.[26]

Children affected by armed conflict require a long continuum of care wherein children, families and communities are supported to build an environment that enhances safety and well-being in a durable and sustainable way. With this approach, reintegration benefits *all* children, reducing stigma and promoting an environment where young people are stakeholders in their own rehabilitation and recovery.

Gender equality, development and peacebuilding are closely linked, and there is a correlation between gender equality and peace and economic growth. Girls in armed conflict are impacted differently from boys and face different challenges with different responsibilities. Responses should take into account that life with armed groups may afford girls with relative freedoms and advantages compared to their lives in their communities and that this can be a powerful draw for girls, and as set out in Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), programmes must involve girls in all decision-making especially when it relates to these sensitive issues.[27] Gender issues also impact boys. A gender-sensitive approach must, *inter alia*, respond to how armed groups stress traditional masculinities and femininities. Actors along the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding continuum must be cognizant of dynamics that orient children towards armed groups, and the correlations between masculinity and violence.

While children may be different from adults in many respects, it does not mean they are universally weak and vulnerable. Children have agency and capacity, and it is important that these capacities,

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[26] "Gaps and Needs of Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups' Successful Reintegration", Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers, 2019

[27] UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), Article 8, http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325; and The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or armed groups, 2007, Chapter 4, https://www.refworld.org/docid/465198442.html

perceptions and rights to participation and inclusion are recognized in reintegration planning programming. Stakeholders should endeavour to plan interventions based on sound contextual research and analysis and ensure they are child-centred and undertaken in the best interests of the child.[28]

Participation and inclusivity are core to Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015)[29] on youth, peace and security, Security Council Resolution 2419 (2018), as well as the UN Youth Strategy which highlights the importance of participation to longer-term peace dividends and prevention. While child reintegration explicitly concerns girls and boys *under the age of 18,* the youth cohort (which often extends to 26) is important given that older teenage CAAFAG are likely to become ineligible for child-focused reintegration programming within a very short space of time.[30] Security Council Resolution 2250 calls for Member States to increase youth representation in decision-making at all levels, as well as mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict. Resolution 2250 provides a platform for Member States and numerous humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors to involve themselves fully in reaching out to former child soldiers by way of participation**,** protection**,** prevention**,** partnerships, disengagement and reintegration**.** It calls on all organizations and entities involved in negotiating and implementing peace agreements to take this into account. Security Council Resolution 2250 particularly calls on Member States to take into account the need to facilitate and enabling environment in which youth are included, given a voice and the space to engage constructively in a culture of tolerance.

Similarly, Security Council Resolution 2419 calls on relevant actors to consider ways to increase the representation of young people when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, recognizing that their marginalization is detrimental to building and sustaining peace.

These issues are especially highlighted in *The Missing Peace*, an independent progress study pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security, which proposes concrete recommendations for the peace and security community to work with young people across the political, economic, education, gender and security spheres.[31] *The Missing Peace* draws attention to the positive dividends for governments and international actors of engaging this otherwise disenfranchised segment of society in peacebuilding and peace sustaining efforts.

The figure below illustrates an ideal protective environment for children, represented by the concentric layers of child protection from parents or primary care-givers to the state and international actors, with the key elements of the system including legislation, justice and the rule of law, service provision and social welfare, and protective attitudes and practice.

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28 Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx
29 UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015); and Security Council Resolution 2419 (2018) on increasing the role of youth in peace negotiations https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2419(2018)
30 *It should be noted that the participation of children under the age of 18 years is not covered by Security Council Resolutions 2250 (2015) and Security Council Resolution 2419 (2018)
31 "The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security", Simpson, G., for the United Nations Population Fund and Peacebuilding Support Office, in response to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) https://www.unfpa.org/resources/missing-peace-independent-progress-study-youth-and-peace-and-security
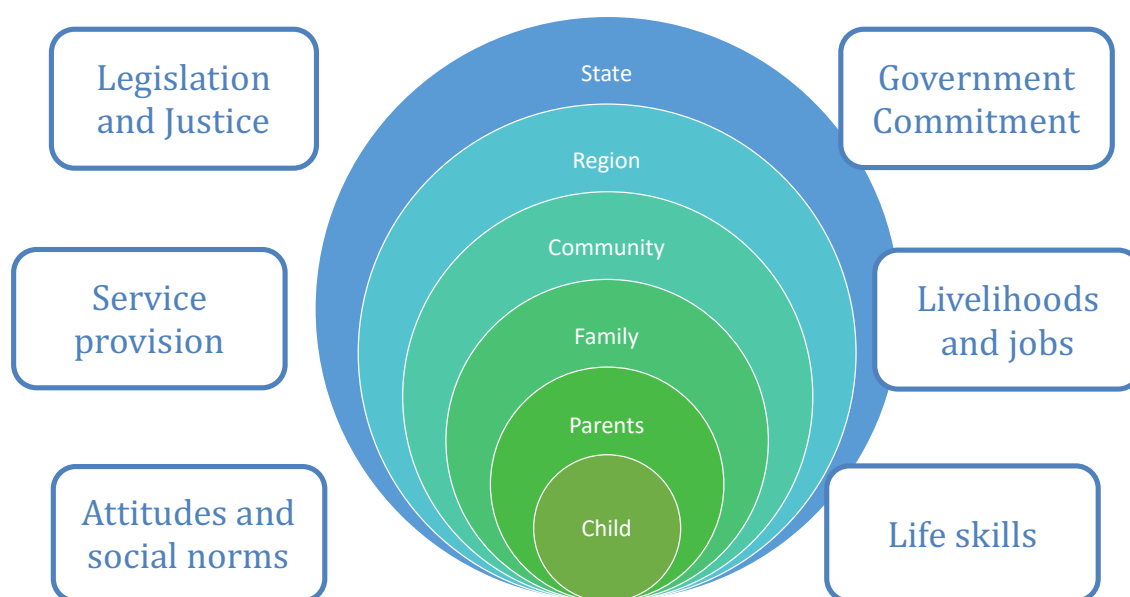
Figure: Protective environment for children affected by armed conflict

4.2   Bridging the Divide: Towards a new approach to opportunity and shared risk

Sustainable and preventive reintegration programming requires governments, local authorities, donors, UN agencies, the private sector and civil society to bridge the divide between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities. This broad range of actors must engage early, seeking synergies to transcend the programmatic silos that emerge as a result of agency mandate, accountabilities or financing. Bridging the HDP divide represents a profound shift from a mandate-centred approach to a multi-agency approach that puts the child at the centre. This is not necessarily a push for humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors to work under a single framework but to share a common strategic vision with combined objectives when it comes to reintegration. Humanitarian actors can and should remain neutral and impartial despite the linkage to state support that the development paradigm implies; and this must be respected. Investment in local structures and civil society through multi-year partnerships beyond the limits of humanitarian support is important not least because the role played by endogenous stakeholders reduces dependency on external actors.

Bridging the HDP nexus challenges the status quo of the aid system, which traditionally operates with limited coordination between humanitarian and development interventions. The nexus goes beyond a programmatic or conceptual approach but relates to structural shifts in how interventions are planned and financed. The emphasis is on a more coherent approach that offers opportunities for longer-term investment to address the systemic causes of conflict and vulnerability, and has a better chance of reducing the impact of cyclical or recurrent stresses.[32]

Donors have a key role to play in helping to arch the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding realms – ensuring that children have long-term access to reintegration services regardless of how funding is earmarked, and which part of the funding and programming continuum is being prioritized. The same can be said for the private sector as a major contributor to the employment sector providing livelihoods in conflict-affected communities, investing in infrastructure and energy sources, and contributing to stable economies. UN agencies and NGOs also should work together to ensure that

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[32] https://reliefweb.int/report/world/humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-what-does-it-mean-multi-mandated-organizations

programming both responds to those who have already experienced harm and fosters resilience and strengthens individuals, communities, families and systems to withstand stresses and proactively prevent child recruitment. The UN and the World Bank especially emphasize the need for convergence of action and funding for peacebuilding and sustaining peace activities to rebuild conflict-affected states, and ensure the safety and protection for all, including child victims of war.[33]

Multiple commitments have been made to children that recognize clearly the role of reintegration and child protection in broader development, peacebuilding and prevention. These include the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, and a series of UN Security Council Resolutions including 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005) and 2225 (2015) on monitoring and reporting grave violations of children's rights, 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security, and 2427 (2018) on treating former child soldiers primarily as victims. In the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2427 (2018) in particular, a legal framework is provided for mainstreaming the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children, and ensuring that children continue to have access to basic services both during and after conflict.

The twin sustaining peace resolutions, General Assembly Resolution 70/262 and Security Council Resolution 2282 (2016) stress the *shared* task of ensuring the involvement and inclusion of children and young people as active participants in building peace. This should flow through all the engagements of the UN, NGOs and relevant stakeholders. It is a collective responsibility – from prevention to post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. The UN's sustaining peace resolutions stress the role of civil society, the private sector, regional and local peacebuilding actors that comprehensively and coherently address the drivers of violent conflict to break the cyclical nature of conflict and mitigates all the drivers and influences that render children vulnerable to recruitment and use.[34] This is essential to the successful reintegration of former child soldiers, as the continued marginalisation of these children might see them re-recruited, or turn to negative coping mechanism such as armed violence and involvement in gangs.

The UN's New Way of Working is one such approach that calls on humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors to harness the comparative advantages of agencies towards collective, sustainable, multi-year outcomes, with concrete and measurable results achieved jointly.[35] The New Way of Working is not just a UN endeavor but takes into account collaboration with a wider set of actors at the country level, and be aligned with national results. The New Way of Working strives to achieve multi-year outcomes over the timeframe of UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF) and country programmes, and to represent intermediate milestones towards the targets set by the SDGs. Achieving national and local ownership is integral to the New Way of Working, where the role of national and local actors is central to the change in mindset required to reduce need, risk and vulnerability. It also recognizes that diversified funding mechanisms that enable the layering of short-, medium- and long-term interventions. The New Way of Working is not a hand-over from humanitarian to development actors in protracted crises, but a collaboration, and is essential for the effective reintegration of child soldiers and their communities.

Opportunity also exists for greater coordination when developing Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) when the support of more than one agency is required in rapid onset or protracted emergencies. HRPs build on overviews of humanitarian needs, provide the evidence base and analysis of a crisis, and identify the most pressing humanitarian needs. In situations where children are being demobilized

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33 "Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict", World Bank and United Nations, 2018 https://www.pathwaysforpeace.org/
34 https://undocs.org/A/72/684
35 https://www.un.org/jsc/content/new-way-working

from armed forces and groups, the needs of these children will inform the strategic objectives in the HRP and will form the basis of cluster plans. HRPs also provide for resource mobilisation for thematic concerns across sectors and provide the humanitarian architecture for an immediate response to child reintegration.[36]

In addition, the UN Secretary-General's call for the revitalization of the UNSDCFs at country level means that strategic plans are informed by sound conflict analyses and are conflict sensitive in their approach. The UNSDCF – formerly the United Nations Development Assistance Framework – is elevated in General Assembly Resolution 70/279 as the most important instrument for planning and implementation of the UN's activities at country level in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[37]

UNSDCF's are underpinned by a Common Country Analysis (CCA) which set out opportunities and challenges for the multi-layered humanitarian, development and peacebuilding agenda within a given country context. The CCA is the tool by which the UN System gathers information and translates it into evidence-based policy changes, advocacy and programming. The crafting of the CCA at country level benefits from the UN's consultation and engagement with the government and other stakeholders; it helps to build partnerships including with financial institutions and the private sector, and should be oriented to inform progress towards the SDGs. Within the CCA, comparative advantage analysis informs the strategic positioning of the UN's programmes. It allows the identification of specific strengths that members of the UN Country Team bring in relation to other partners. These advantages include their mandates and capacities to act, and are not limited to those activities with which agencies are most familiar and comfortable, but where they can best add value. CCA comparative advantage analyses are therefore highly relevant to programming and results related to the reintegration of CAAFAG as they identify how apparently unrelated investment and programming in (post-) conflict-affected contexts can be harnessed to better support former child soldiers.[38] The CCA is also where the linkages to the SDGs should be made.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development focuses attention on peace and development dividends through coordinated and concerted investment and action. Many governments, donors, UN agencies and others are already making gains towards attaining the SDGs – which in a sense means they are already working towards a more protective environment for children. Many of the SDGs relate directly to the lives of children, and are relevant to former CAAFAG and the prevention of recruitment and use. In this regard, the most pertinent are SDG 4: Quality Education, SDG 5: Gender Equality, SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, and SDG 16: Peace, justice and effective and inclusive institutions. Indeed, SDG Target 8.7 refers explicitly to the need to eradicate the recruitment and use of children, while Target 16.2 calls for an end to abuse, exploitation and all forms of violence against children with the imperative of 'leaving no one behind'; therefore the SDGs are the platform for governments to end the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups by 2030.

The diagram below shows the contribution of a multi-faceted child reintegration programme to the SDGs and the broader protective environment for children. As has been mentioned, for reintegration to be a success, it requires a multiplicity of national and external actors providing support to CAAFAG across sectors and across HDP domains, simultaneously and over time, and within an overall framework of strengthening the child protection system. Conversely, if the child protection system and broader development and peace conditions in a conflict-affected country are unable to protect children and mitigate risk (denoted below as 'Break down'), the cycle of violence is likely to continue and children will remain exposed to recruitment and re-recruitment.

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36 https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/programme-cycle/space/page/strategic-response-planning
37 https://undg.org/document/united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework/
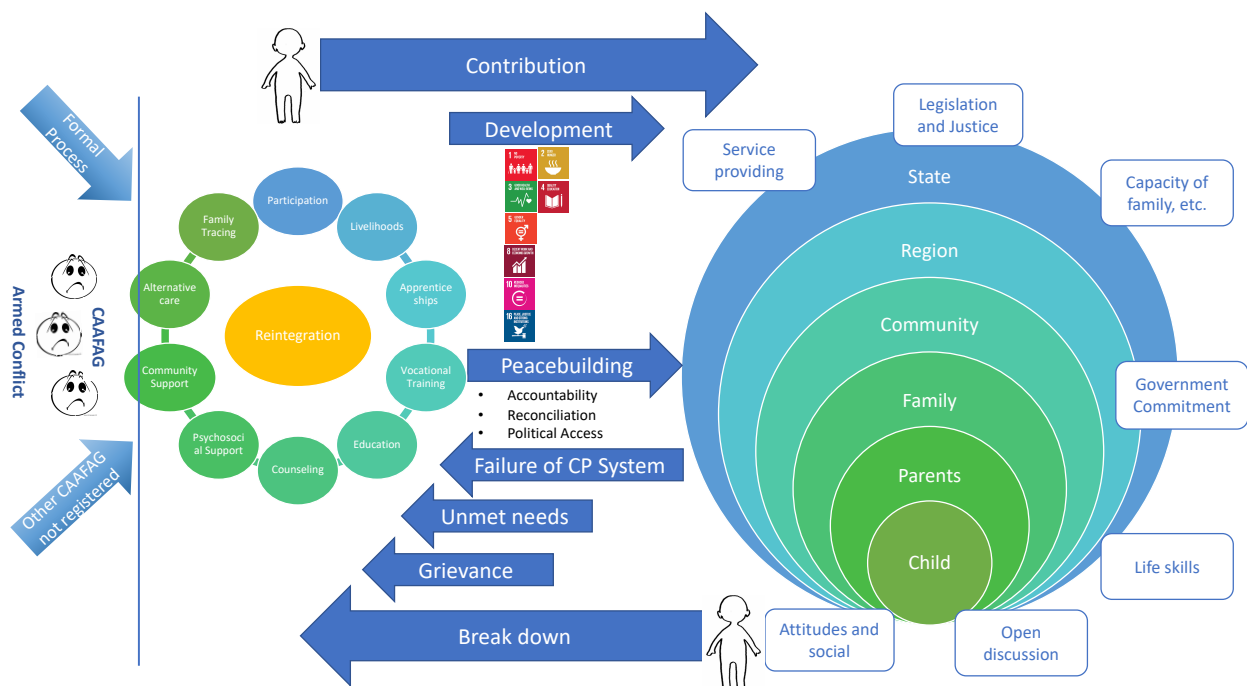38 https://undg.org/programme/undaf-guidance/common-country-analysis/

Figure: Contribution of child reintegration to attaining SDGs and strengthening the protective environment for all children affected by armed conflict

4.3   Reintegration in the humanitarian sphere

The reintegration of children in humanitarian action means providing an immediate response to children upon their exit from armed groups, providing child protection services, preventing violations of children's rights and minimizing key vulnerabilities. Traditionally, humanitarian actors have taken a lead role in reintegrating CAAFAG given the children's specific circumstances and immediate, life-saving needs.

Humanitarian practitioners must identify and verify children formerly associated, whether they are released through a formal process or exit informally. Humanitarian actors work directly with children (and where possible families) to understand their immediate concerns and to develop care plans going forward. A key principle advanced by humanitarian action in relation to child recruitment is the child's right to participation. This recognizes that children have agency and capacity relative to their age, and must be consulted in any reintegration process. Humanitarian teams work with communities, youth groups and local leaders – and carry out public information campaigns – to advocate and raise awareness of the negative consequences of child recruitment and the benefits of reintegration. As a priority, and where it is safe, children are assisted in tracing their families or care-givers. They are offered psychosocial support, assisted to return to education or enter into vocational training, and provided health services as per their individual requirements. Interim care solutions in family-based or small-group settings are provided for children whose families are being traced, or who may be unable or unwilling to return immediately. Fundamentally, child protection lead agencies such as UNICEF and Save the Children promote coordination and cooperation among the necessary actors, develop and standardize tools for managing cases, and establish referral pathways to other sectors. This coordination and cooperation with multiple actors and across sectors is crucial to ensuring a continuum of support for children; as humanitarian action lays the ground for longer-term

reconciliation, acceptance and healing, as well as interventions within the development sphere that seek to build resilience to future shocks.

According to the World Bank, since the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, efforts have been taken to integrate humanitarian and development assistance more robustly – the overlap in the two domains of the nexus – recognising the need to respond to the immediate, life-saving concerns while strengthening the economic and social environment, peacebuilding and sustaining peace. The World Humanitarian Summit is noted as having fostered important commitments in this regard with Member States and international stakeholders pledging to improve joint planning and predictability in delivery.[39]

Given the humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality, neutrality and humanity, humanitarian actors need to consider how and to what extent they might engage in government-led programming particularly where the government is identified as a party to the conflict, responsible or complicit in grave violations of children's rights, or is engaged in politically-driven actions. Humanitarian organizations, especially those that operate across the humanitarian-development realms, will interpret this differently, but engaging in the longer-term objectives of child reintegration can certainly be problematic. It is therefore critical that humanitarian and development actors have sufficient resources to work in tandem from the earliest possible stage, designing programmes that can not only work consecutively but also *concurrently* towards collective objectives.

The humanitarian community should ensure that the needs of CAAFAG continue to be met while gradually working toward ending dependence on humanitarian assistance – strengthening the resilience of local populations and structures and making them more able to withstand potential future shocks. The fact that humanitarian actors are committing to the medium- to long-term has meant that they often share the same operational environment as those working in the development and peacebuilding domains.

4.4   Spotlight on children in global development agenda

When we consider the centrality of child reintegration to the development agenda, one of the primary aims is *prevention,* and this in turn is linked to root causes. Reducing violence, including violence against children, and preventing their recruitment and re-recruitment should be seen as a continuum of well-coordinated efforts to strengthen coherence between humanitarian, development and peace sustaining actions. While they have quite different estimates, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank predict that by 2030 more than 50 percent of the world's poor will live in countries affected by fragility and violence, while the cost of humanitarian assistance to these countries will be as much as US $50 billion per year.[40]

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – as well as other development agenda such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 – focus attention on peace and development through such coordinated and concerted investment and action.[41][42] The SDGs provide for a harmonized way of working so that interventions not only meet the needs of those affected but also reduce risk and vulnerability. Many of the 17 SDGs relate directly to the lives of children and are relevant to child soldiers and other children

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39 "Pathways of Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict", World Bank and United Nations, 2018, Chapter 7, p.254
40 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015: (>80%) https://www.oecd.org/dac/states-of-fragility-2015-9789264227699-en.htm; World Bank 2011 (50%)
41 https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment
42 https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview

affected by armed conflict. In adopting the SDGs, governments agreed to end the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups by 2030.[43]

The 2030 Agenda asserts the inextricable link between human rights, peace and development. The SDGs are indivisible, with efforts to achieve one goal instrumental to achieving another. Key to this is building peaceful, just and inclusive societies as a fundamental component of development outcomes. The SDGs represent a pledge by Member States to leave no one behind and therefore the needs of children must be a primary consideration. The human and economic cost of armed conflict globally requires all stakeholders to work collaboratively with the SDGs at the core of this approach; with all those concerned with development providing support to prevention agendas through targeted and sustained engagement at the national and regional levels.

The SDGs are universal and impact every aspect of children's well-being. SDG 4 affirms the right of every child to quality education. When children are abducted or recruited into armed groups, made to abandon their homes and/or relocated, their education is severely disrupted. In protracted armed conflict, generations of children – especially those associated with armed groups – are likely to miss out on critical school years. When children are demobilized or exit from armed entities, providing them with access to education, for example through accelerated learning programmes or catch-up education, must be a priority. Effective education programmes for former child soldiers will be inclusive of all children affected by the war environment and will seek to minimize division or 'special treatment' for one group over another. Some former child soldiers may not have the option of going back to their communities for their education. If development is to be successful, these children must be assisted in finding ways to contribute to society through 'life-long' out-of-school education or through vocational training opportunities.

Gender inequity – especially the invisibility of girls – in reintegration programming remains a concern, and the effective reintegration of CAAFAG is paramount to the realization of SDG 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The marginalization of girls, their limited access to services and the prevalence of harmful traditional practices such as early marriage in some countries, can be seen as a direct manifestation of gender inequality, reflecting societal values that deprive girls of agency. Social norms and attitudes that disenfranchise girls and women and limit their opportunity to reach their full potential are known to be significant drivers to girls joining armed groups. If governments are committed to attain gender equality by 2030, efforts must be made to break this cycle. Furthermore, given the extent to which harmful practices are upheld by tradition and social norms, states must measure and acquire a nuanced understanding of the prevalence of these practices, attitudes and beliefs, including readiness or resistance to change.

Social Development Goal 8 aims through preventive action to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking; secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour; protect labour rights; and achieve equal pay for work of equal value. The recruitment and use of children by armed groups is a grave violation of child rights and is considered by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as one of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.[44]

Strengthening peace, justice and effective and inclusive institutions – SDG 16 – is key in conflict-affected countries. As many as 36 targets across the 2030 Agenda (collectively referred to as SDG 16+) are directly related to peace, justice or inclusivity. Accountability for child recruitment, and other grave violations against children, is an important part of preventing their recurrence. The primary responsibility for protecting a country's citizens lies with the state and where possible it is the state

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43 "Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict", O'Neil, S. and Van Broeckhoven, K. (eds.), UN University
44 ILO Convention 182, Article 3 https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C182

that must take the lead in ensuring accountability and justice, with violations against children and other crimes must be investigated promptly and effectively, and prosecutions must be pursued.

4.5   Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

Reintegration that contributes to development, peacebuilding and a broad palette of post-conflict interventions should orientate projects in a way that uncovers avenues for reconciliation that account for community dynamics, and determines what elements of pre-conflict life gave communities their cohesion. This refers to systems and institutions such as civil infrastructure, attitudes, shared values and interests, common experiences, symbols and community events, all of which can be supported under the umbrella of reintegration.

International actors are increasingly working with national governments and local authorities in formulating bottom-up, non-military community engagement strategies that work on preventing armed conflict. These may include community violence reduction programmes implemented in support of release and reintegration, and focused on the reduction of violence within a community through the prevention of recruitment by armed groups[45]. Other strategies may also include local projects focused on the protection of civilians.

These efforts, usually carried out in the context of international peace operations, converge with the actions of development actors focusing on peacebuilding and reconciliation as well as broader economic recovery.[46]

While children formerly associated with armed forces and groups are by no means predisposed to violence, they may be drawn as many young people are to engaging in groups and articulating their needs through group dynamics. Child reintegration is therefore an estimable opportunity for the pro-social engagement of young people after they exit armed groups, so that they can take their skills and any predisposition to participate in groups forward constructively, in leadership and other engagements that replace what they may have experienced or been looking for initially in the armed group.

However, where there is opportunity there are risks if reintegration is not managed well. Grievances of former child soldiers and other children affected by armed conflict are often related to the actions of the state in addressing needs, and weak state structures initiate a 'trickle-down' effect which impacts group vulnerability and leads to manipulation. This results in unmet needs and ultimately the manifestation of violence, with weak states particularly subject to the external political, military, economic and social interests which influence the continuation of conflict and ultimately the recruitment and re-recruitment of children. Protracted conflict is in cyclical nature – it is a self-perpetuating and repetitive chain of events, and is intrinsically linked to the wider phenomenon of conflict protraction.[47]

The mechanisms needed for state and non-state actors to commit, cooperate and coordinate along peaceful pathways should be strengthened. A significant proportion of the UN peace and security budget is spent on containment of armed conflict while room to assess the drivers of armed conflict and *prevent* it from happening is limited. If the cycle of conflict is not broken, unmet needs and drivers of conflict will remain unaddressed and the dynamics of protracted conflict will continue.

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45 https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/ddr-and-cvr-creating-space-for-peace.pdf
46 "Pathways of Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict", World Bank and United Nations, 2018, Chapter 7, p.254
47 Ibid., Exec. Summary, p.xxii

Strengthening the Rule of Law, ensuring justice and accountability, fair access to services and fostering reconciliation are essential components of peacebuilding.

The UN defines peacebuilding as efforts to reduce a country's risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development.[48] There are many areas of overlap between child reintegration and peacebuilding calling for improved coherence amongst actors and across time. As referenced earlier in this paper, these overlaps – or nexus – with peacebuilding include education, livelihoods, participation, inclusion and gender equity. A holistic and sustained peacebuilding focus on children and youth is tantamount to efficiently, effectively and sustainably mitigating risk among the largest spoilers, and their associates, of any peace effort.

In recent years, the language of peacebuilding has been supplemented with the concept of sustaining peace.[49] The Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2001/15 and the Policy Committee decision of 2007 define peacebuilding as preventing the outbreak, recurrence and/or continuation of armed conflict. Sustaining peace flows through all the UN's engagements, from development and humanitarian to human rights and peace and security activities; it is a shared responsibility that runs through every aspect of work from prevention to post-conflict recovery and reconstruction, and requires coherence across all three major intergovernmental organs of the UN (the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council), as well as at the national and sub-national levels of conflict-affected societies. Evidence shows that when Member States and the Peacebuilding Commission, which advises the General Assembly and the Security Council, are well supported by the UN System – including UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme and relevant partners – efforts to build and sustain peace sees significant dividends. Investment in local structures and civil society is crucial to strengthening resilience and reducing dependency on external actors over time.

The UN's twin sustaining peace resolutions, General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/262 and Security Council Resolution S/RES/2282 (2016), further state that "sustaining peace encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict."[50] Both peacebuilding and sustaining peace are intended to reduce the risk of a lapse into violent conflict.

The sustaining peace agenda stresses the need to scale-up innovations not only in UN peacekeeping operations but across UN country teams. UN agencies engaged in post-conflict development have a role to play in conflict prevention and sustaining peace, noting that there is a balance between development and security approaches in efforts to build a durable peace and to prevent further outbreak of conflict. The UN and the World Bank's study *Pathways for Peace* emphasizes the need for improvements in both upstream and downstream peacebuilding programming in order to restore confidence in the authority of fragile states.[51] Equipping them with effective, inclusive and supportive institutions that are resilient to conflict should be seen as a universal goal by all actors.[52]

The correlation between poverty and armed conflict is disappearing, with the spread of violent conflicts in middle-income countries, although poverty alone was never a cause of armed conflict. The central issue is grievance, which stems from lack of reconciliation and a continuing cycle of unmet needs.[53]

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48 https://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/peacebuilding.shtml
49 A/RES/70/262 https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/262; S/RES/2282 (2016) https://undocs.org/S/RES/2282(2016)
50 Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2001/15; General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/262; Security Council Resolution S/RES/2282
51 "Pathways of Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict", World Bank and United Nations, 2018
52 A/72/707–S/2018/43
53 Brinkman, Henk-Jan, UN Peacebuilding Support Office, pers. comms, 2019; and "Theory of Human Motivation", Maslow, A. (1943) cited in "Self-concept and Self-Esteem", Huitt W. (2004)

5. CONCLUSIONS

The successful reintegration of CAAFAG is essential to the attainment of SDGs in conflict-affected countries. Yet, despite significant advances in the child reintegration policy and programming landscape, child reintegration remains unable to guarantee that the longer-term needs of CAAFAG will be met in a way that contributes to overarching development and peace, and prevents vulnerability. The SDGs provide important entry points to reframe child reintegration and address some of the weaknesses of current child reintegration efforts.

This paper has taken into account the current gaps and needs in today's reintegration landscape.[54] It has noted the decline in overall funding for reintegration globally despite an increase in the number of armed conflicts around the world, and recognised that where funding exists it is usually limited to short-term funding baskets that limit agencies ability to address, *inter alia*, the more systemic drivers of children's vulnerability to recruitment and use. The genesis of the paper is that reintegration has hitherto been seen as a niche issue sitting in the humanitarian domain, with largely exogenous resources being used for endogenous problems. The paper has suggested that the current communication, coordination and collaboration of stakeholders across the HDP nexus is insufficient and that actors must do more to agree on child-centred metrics for successful reintegration, and recognise that achieving this is a shared opportunity to achieving collective outcomes. This paper recognises that many stakeholders in each of the HDP domains already contribute to the reintegration needs of CAAFAG indirectly. There is much good work being done, and to some extent lost, in silos. Realising child reintegration as a shared opportunity and risk, and therefore working together on the overlaps or touch-points between the HDP domains, agreeing on success determinates and monitoring them is critical.

Reframing child reintegration calls for a better funded, multi-sectoral approach to reintegration by a far broader range of public and private sector stakeholders than is currently the norm, within an overall rubric of increasing the responsibility and accountability of national counterparts over time. *The SDGs allow for such reframing*. Reframing reintegration asserts that while policy for the reintegration of children – the IDDRS and The Paris Principles – remain inviolable to good practice (e.g. the importance of an inclusive, participatory, community-based approach to reintegration that frames reintegration programming within broader efforts to strengthen the protective environment for all children), more needs to be done to bridge the HDP nexus and foster greater synergy around *prevention*. Essentially, the framework for this is the SDGs, as these are universal, impact every aspect of children's well-being, allow for a focus on prevention, have a longer-term horizon and represent a pledge by Member States to leave no one behind.

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54 "Gaps and Needs of Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups' Successful Reintegration", Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers, 2019

6.   RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations compliment those presented in the Global Coalition's paper *Gaps and Needs of Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups' Successful Reintegration* which cover programme planning and design, costing and funding, and recommendations for states on policy and practice:[55]

- Use the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to reframe child reintegration by lengthening the time horizon, address various programming aspects of child reintegration, including Health (SDG 3), education and training (SDG 4) and livelihoods and jobs (SDG 8), and broaden the beneficiaries beyond the former child soldiers;

- Use the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs to address vulnerabilities and drivers of recruitment and violent conflicts, such as inequalities, lack of jobs, poor natural resource management and corruption;

- Recognize that the successful reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups (CAAFAG) is a shared opportunity for multiple public and private sector stakeholders in research, policy and practice across the Humanitarian Development Peace (HDP) nexus;

- Support national and/or local ownership of child reintegration programmes wherever appropriate and possible; promote and facilitate transparency, accountability and responsiveness from duty bearers towards CAAFAG;

- Adopt a common strategic vision and theory of change – in line with the UN's New Way of Working – where sector actors across the HDP nexus harness comparative advantages towards collective, sustainable, multi-year reintegration outcomes, that contribute to a robust protective environment for children and strong child protection systems, without compromise to humanitarian principles;

- Elevate the role of civil society, the private sector, and regional and local peacebuilding actors in establishing a coherent framework of engagement that addresses the cyclical nature of conflict, and mitigates drivers and influences that render children vulnerable to recruitment and use;

- Explore avenues and opportunities for partnerships and inter-agency approaches to child reintegration across the HDP nexus;

- Ensure that activities by the range of UN actors and partners that relate to child reintegration are identified as such and included in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF) at country level, so that strategic plans can be developed according to collective outcomes;

- Utilize Common Country Analyses (CCA) to gather information and translate it into evidence-based policy changes, advocacy and programming for child reintegration as necessary; ensure that plans are informed by conflict analyses and are responsive to the short-, medium- and long-term needs of former CAAFAG and their communities;

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55 Ibid.

- Identify where investments in post-conflict reconstruction and development across sectors contributes have, or have the potential to contribute, to inclusive, community-based reintegration of former CAAFAG; and leverage this work so that reintegration support can be mainstreamed into existing funding and programming;

- Ensure, in accordance with The Paris Principles (2007), Chapter 4, the inclusion of girls in reintegration programming from the planning phase through design of eligibility criteria, screening procedures, service provision and monitoring. Take measures to ensure that girls are included and relevant issues addressed at all stages;

7. ANNEXES

Annex 1: Legal framework for preventing and responding to child recruitment

Across the world, girls and boys under the age of 18 are legally protected. The use of children by armed forces and groups is forbidden under an extensive body of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, criminal law and labour law and is a violation of the fundamental rights of the child.[56] While acknowledging that some children have agency in decision making, the rhetoric of voluntary recruitment – children joining armed groups 'intentionally' – is flawed. In situations of armed conflict, children may make a choice but this is set against a background of insecurity, human rights violations and social and economic pressures that together render the idea of free choice meaningless.[57]

The Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1977 prohibit the military use of children under the age of 15, with doing so now recognized as a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2002).[58]

In 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, States Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest.[59]

In 2000, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict raised the standard as the world's first international treaty wholly focused on ending the military exploitation of children; prohibiting non-state armed groups from recruiting and using any child under the age of 18.[60]

The ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182 of 1999 commits states to take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour as a matter of urgency. The term 'child' applies to all persons under the age of 18 years, and the worst forms of child labour include forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.[61]

As of February 2007, The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and The Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups, have been endorsed by 58 states and have the specific objective of preventing recruitment, securing the disengagement of children from armed

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[56] Additional Protocol I (1977) to the Geneva Conventions (1949), Article 77(2), and Additional Protocol II (1977) Article 4(3)(c); Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court document A/CONF.183/9 of 17 July 1998 and corrected on 10 November 1998, 12 July 1999, 30 November 1999, 8 May 2000, 17 January 2001 and 16 January 2002; Articles 7(1) and 8(2); Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000); International Labour Organisation (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182, Article 3(a)

[57] "Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict", O'Neil, S. and Van Broeckhoven, K. (eds.), UN University; Introduction, Section 5, p.32

[58] Additional Protocols (1977) to the Geneva Conventions (1949); and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court document A/CONF 183/9 of 17 July 1998 and corrected on 10 November 1998, 12 July 1999, 30 November 1999, 8 May 2000, 17 January 2001 and 16 January 2002; Articles 7(1) and 8(2)

[59] Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 38(3)

[60] Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict: Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly Resolution A/RES/54/263 of 25 May 2000; entry into force 12 February 2002

[61] International Labour Organisation (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182 (1999), Article 3(a)

agenda and supporting their reintegration to civilian life.[62] The Paris Principles allow for *all* children under the age of 18 years in military ranks, in any role, to be covered collectively by the term 'child soldiers' and therefore afforded the benefit of protection under international law. The Paris Principles take into account the fact that the number of CAAFAG who actually carry weapons is just the tip of the iceberg, and that there are proportionally more child soldiers filling support and auxiliary roles.[63]

The United Nations Security Council has passed a series of resolutions condemning the recruitment and use of children in hostilities: Security Council Resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011) and 2225 (2015) on children and armed conflict; and further Resolutions on youth participation and reintegration within a broader framework of peacebuilding and conflict mitigation: 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2427 (2018).

In November 2017, The Vancouver Principles saw member states set out and reaffirm political commitment to regulate and train their own armed forces to prevent child recruitment in the context of peacekeeping operations. The Vancouver Principles are particularly cognizant of the need for early warning and active prevention in addressing the drivers that influence children's participation in hostilities.

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62 The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or armed groups, February 2007
63 Other thematic guidance related to reintegration programming includes but not limited to the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Inter-Agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection, International Network for Education in Emergencies Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings.