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Child Soldiers

Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating

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Abstract

Among the most egregious child rights violations, an estimated 300,000 child soldiers are involved in armed conflicts. Although a number of countries have undertaken demobilization and reintegration programs for child soldiers, there remains a dearth of documentation and dissemination of program experience and best practice to guide the countries.

This working paper draws from in-depth case studies on Angola and El Salvador, as well as other country program experiences. The study follows the themes of prevention, demobilization, and reintegration, detailing concrete examples and offering checklists on each of the main themes for use in future programs. Although demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers is often seen as hopeless, this study shows that children and youths involved in armed conflict can re-engage positive social relations and productive civilian lives. It is not easy, however, and depends crucially on the political will and resources to include child soldiers in peace agreements and demobilization programs and to support their reintegration into family and community.

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Preface

This working paper shares lessons learned about demobilization and reintegration programs for child soldiers. The paper originated with field studies, begun in 1998 in collaboration with UNICEF, documenting the experience of two countries—Angola and El Salvador—where child soldiers were used extensively during conflict.

Angola's demobilization exercise, which lasted from 1995 to 1997, was one of the most extensive in the history of the United Nations. It was perhaps the first time that children were specifically included in a peace process. While not explicit in the 1994 Lusaka Protocol, their demobilization and reintegration was declared a priority in the first resolution adopted by the commission set up to implement the peace agreement. Partnerships among local civil society networks made it possible for many children to return to their homes.

El Salvador's case is one of the United Nations' most successful peacemaking missions. This experience offers a long-term perspective on the transition to civilian life for child soldiers, which began after the 1992 peace accord. El Salvador is also significant because many of the child soldiers were girls. Important, if disturbing, lessons were learned from the fact that child soldiers were excluded from the peace accord and the demobilization and reintegration programs.

The full case studies on Angola and El Salvador, published separately,* provide a number of practical references as well as a candid discussion of lessons and challenges faced by the programs. This working paper highlights lessons learned from Angola and El Salvador—and integrates lessons from other countries—in order to broaden best practices in future programs for child soldiers.

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* The full case studies are published separately as: Verhey, Beth, "Prevention, Demobilization and Reintegration of Child Soldiers: Lessons Learned from Angola" and "Prevention, Demobilization and Reintegration of Child Soldiers: Lessons Learned from El Salvador," 2001. These are accessible on the World Bank Post-Conflict website. To access, go to http://worldbank.org, click on Topics then Social Development, and, finally, Post-Conflict.

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Introduction

A child soldier is any person under eighteen years of age who is part of any regular or irregular armed force or group. This includes those who are forcibly recruited as well as those who join voluntarily. All child or adolescent participants regardless of function—cooks, porters, messengers, girls used as "wives," and other support functions—are included as well as those considered combatants.

Among the most egregious child rights violations, an estimated 300,000 child soldiers are involved in armed conflicts. Because of the length of many conflicts, the blurring of civilian and military targets, and the proliferation of small arms, the involvement of children in conflict has increased in recent decades.

When the Ugandan National Resistance Army arrived in Kampala in 1986 with children as young as four among their ranks, they caught the attention of the media and child advocates. Coverage of conflicts in Cambodia, Liberia, Mozambique, and other countries has also highlighted the use of child soldiers.

Child soldiers have often been called "future barbarians" and "killing machines." Many child soldiers virtually grow up within an armed movement. They may have joined for protection, or face an environment where joining an armed group seemed the only choice in life.

Demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers is often portrayed as hopeless—especially where child soldiers have been forcibly recruited and made to participate in atrocities. Yet, this study demonstrates that children and youths involved in armed conflict can re-engage positive social relations and productive civilian lives. It is not easy, however, and depends crucially on the political will and resources to include child soldiers in peace agreements and demobilization programs and to support their reintegration into family and community.

The years of development a child loses to soldiering, no matter how they join or are recruited, profoundly affects their future identity. Because child soldiers are deprived of the normal cultural, moral, and values socialization gained from families and communities, they experience a process of *asocialization*.

A number of countries have undertaken demobilization and reintegration programs for child soldiers. But, because of a dearth of documentation and dissemination of program experience and best practice, these countries have had little guidance or access to the experience of others.

The 1996 United Nations Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children,[1] backed by extensive research from non-governmental organizations, played a crucial role in demonstrating the global problem of child soldiers. Most welcome is the May 2000 Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which raises the minimum age for participation in armed conflict from fifteen to eighteen years.[2]

Determining best practice with child soldiers is an ongoing effort. And for program practitioners, it is often difficult to translate a list of best practice principles into local application.Concerted efforts and funding are needed to evaluate, document, and disseminate lessons. In addition to disseminating program experience, that of national program practitioners should also be supported in staff and program exchanges.

Background and methodology

Drawing from in-depth case studies on Angola and El Salvador, as well as other country program experiences, this working paper provides concrete examples

for use in future programs. The paper stems from a collaboration with UNICEF on lessons learned in the prevention, demobilization, and reintegration of children involved in armed conflict. The World Bank Post Conflict Unit funded the research and preparation of this paper as a key area of post-conflict reconstruction and sustainable development goals.

The lessons learned are consolidated from different social, cultural, and historical situations where a conflict included the use of child soldiers. While the lessons and programs discussed may be transferable to different countries and experiences, each will require local analysis and planning.

The field research for the Angola and El Salvador case studies began in July 1998. The author undertook field missions from July to September 1998. Methodologies included semi-structured interviews and focus groups with program practitioners, policy actors, former child soldiers, and their families, as well as a review of reports and documentation. Some of the program partners in Angola provided follow up data on child soldiers. For El Salvador, the author organized a follow-up survey of former child soldiers in partnership with UNICEF–El Salvador and the social research team of UCA, the José Simeón Cañas Universidad Centroamericana. The follow-up survey was conducted over December 1998 and January 1999. Because each case study was addressing the situation of child soldiers some years after the origin of programs, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with former program staff.

The research did not evaluate the programs but rather sought to identify lessons learned and document program experience. As such, interviews emphasized reflection, and recommendations to future programs. Desk research and literature reviews complemented the research and underscored the relevance of the lessons learned from Angola and El Salvador.

Organization of the working paper

This working paper should be seen in two parts. The full case studies on Angola and El Salvador are published separately as: Verhey, Beth, "Prevention, Demobilization and Reintegration of Child Soldiers: Lessons Learned from Angola" and "Prevention, Demobilization and Reintegration of Child Soldiers: Lessons Learned from El Salvador," 2001. This paper highlights and discusses the lessons learned from Angola and El Salvador and integrates other country program experiences towards best practice for future programs.

The paper follows the themes of prevention, demobilization, and reintegration. Chapter 1 highlights the role of civil society actors to prevent the re-recruitment of child soldiers in the course of demobilization programs. Chapter 2 details the crucial importance of including child soldiers in peace processes and demobilization programs. Chapter 2 also presents a discussion on the use of special centers in demobilization and reintegration. Chapter 3 underscores the importance of psychosocial approaches and provides lessons on improving education and vocational opportunities for child soldiers. Each chapter ends with a checklist of lessons learned for future program consideration.

The annexes include:
- Recommended readings
- A reference on the international legal framework for child soldiers
- A discussion of terminology
- A summary table of the main lessons learned from the Angola and El Salvador case studies.

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1 The report, by Graça Machel, was adopted unanimously by the General Assembly (see Annex I).

2 The Optional Protocol addresses the age difference of fifteen years and eighteen years between Article 38 and Article 1 of the CRC. See the legal framework in Annex II for further discussion and information.

1

Prevention

While this working paper focuses on program actions for children already involved in armed conflict, prevention remains an urgent concern.

Although advocacy efforts aiming to enforce international law, in particular the new Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, will contribute to preventing future involvement of children in armed conflict, prevention must be considered more broadly. Practical measures to prevent the involvement of children in armed conflict require much greater attention and development. For example, education and other youth activities, food security and the security of refugee camps have a direct relationship in preventing child recruitment. Supporting civil society in protesting recruitment locally and preventing re-recruitment are important protection actions aimed at prevention.

Advocacy and supporting civil society

Advocacy is essential to prevention. Advocacy requires persistence and a full range of actions including,

- Raising awareness of child rights through a variety of media—including education and training for military and other armed forces as well as efforts to reach children and their families
- Monitoring and documenting child rights abuses
- Using local and international human rights reporting mechanisms—local reporting mechanisms should engage political and military officials and community leaders in redressing cases of child recruitment
- Situation analysis of which children and youths are most vulnerable to recruitment
- Promoting compliance with international law, with emphasis on the Convention on the Rights of the

Child, and developing legislation with different national and local policy-makers
- Partnering with and building capacity of local associations addressing related concerns, such as unaccompanied children and street or working children.

At the grassroots level, prevention may include apprising children and their families of their rights to resist recruitment, or encourage the intervention of community and religious leaders to stop child recruitment or gain the release of children. For example, in El Salvador, national human rights and civil society organizations protested, often at great risk, many cases of forcibly recruited youth. The organizations most involved were the non-governmental Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, the Catholic Church, and women's associations representing the missing. The action these groups most often took was to approach the military officials of a barracks and demand, often successfully, the release of children. In addition, the women's associations organized demonstrations in the capital and made an appeal to parliament. Bishops and other Church officials spoke publicly to promote human rights principles and condemn the involvement of children in the conflict.

Redressing child recruitment abuses must be a priority prevention action. Measuring whether advocacy efforts prevent recruitment is difficult, especially in the short term; but child protection work must be a fundamental and pro-active part of humanitarian programs. Children growing up within the context of conflict—and their families—feel they have no choice

about participating. Preventing recruitment requires that awareness of child rights be expanded and that the social and cultural values of child protection be mobilized.

Notably, the local groups in El Salvador received outside support only when the UN human rights team was deployed during the last year of the conflict. International agencies offering humanitarian assistance feared that protesting the recruitment of children *would be seen as political involvement in the conflict.*

Best practice now recognizes the importance of incorporating child rights into humanitarian advocacy. For example, the humanitarian principles project of Operation Lifeline Sudan Southern Sector (OLS)[1] succeeded in gaining the parties' commitment to the principles of the Geneva Conventions and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). Significantly, while advocacy in El Salvador was primarily directed at the government, OLS Southern Sector works specifically with non-state parties—the Southern Sudan rebel movements.

The OLS project featured awareness raising and training workshops to promote humanitarian principles and children's rights. Leaflets were disseminated through churches, schools, health centers, and military barracks. Workshops, attended by over 7,000 people, are credited with making families aware of the prohibition against recruiting children under fifteen years of age, and with decreasing abductions from schools.

Partnering with civil society requires a situation analysis of each country. While the church in El Salvador and women's associations were the primary civil society actors engaged in protection actions for children, the "relief wings" of the rebel movements—teachers, families and church leaders—all play significant roles in Southern Sudan. In another context, *muy safid,* traditional elders, in Afghanistan have, in some cases, reached agreements with local commanders to regulate the conscription of youth.

In some cases, armed groups take their protective role with children seriously. The Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) rebel coalition in El Salvador responded to public criticism and resentment about recruiting children. During the conflict, the FMLN leadership adopted a policy to stop forcibly recruiting children and to give all children already recruited the option of leaving the rebel force.

Preventing re-recruitment

The 1995–1998 Angola demobilization and reintegration program included measures to prevent the re-recruitment of children. The Angola legal framework on child soldiers included a provision that child soldiers would not be subject to Angola's compulsory military service regime. In addition, the legal framework included a provision that child soldiers could receive demobilization documentation and benefits outside of the formal demobilization assembly areas.[2]

The Angola experience shows that some prevention of re-recruitment was effected through the accompaniment and family reunification strategy. The Angola program featured an extensive community-based network whose members accompanied child soldiers from demobilization through family reunification.[3] Some officials of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rebel force acknowledged that family reunification obstructed their recruitment strategies. But despite these positive lessons, child soldiers were unprotected in the quartering and demobilization process. (Chapter 2 outlines how UNITA used the demobilization process for new recruitment and re-recruitment of child soldiers.)

The resumption of the Angolan conflict presents the challenge of preventing re-recruitment in stark reality. In the case of government recruitment, the legal framework provisions regarding compulsory military service should be upheld. Because of awareness raised

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Angola Legal Framework on Underage Soldiers

- Recognized the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Angolan Law (Law 1/93) providing for eighteen years as the minimum age for military service.
- 1996 was determined the "calendar year" of demobilization. All soldiers born after 1 January 1978 were to be considered underage.
- As a measure to prevent re-recruitment, all underage soldiers were granted *"disponibilidade"* status, guaranteeing full exemption from future military service.
- Gave "open status" to all underage soldiers' files, preventing consideration as deserters and guaranteeing the right to demobilization, and benefits if not present on day of demobilization.

Prevention lessons checklist

- What is the national law on the age of recruitment?
- Is there advocation for ratification and implementation of the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict?
- Is there a mechanism to redress cases of underage recruitment?
- Is child recruitment being documented and reported through national and international human rights groups?
- Is a variety of media being engaged to advocate against the use of child soldiers?
- Who are the community leaders, religious leaders, women's associations or other national networks that can advocate against child recruitment? Are there traditional practices and values upon which to base child protection measures?
- Which networks and contacts can reach non-state parties to promote their commitment to the principles of the CRC and prevent recruitment (e.g., religious leaders, diaspora, or other social structures)?
- Is there a situation analysis being done to ascertain which children are the most vulnerable to recruitment (e.g., members of particular ethnic groups, those internally displaced or in refugee camps, children in institutions, working children, or unaccompanied children)?
- Which programs and activities can reach these groups and contribute to prevention (e.g., formal and non-formal education, food security measures, cultural and psychosocial support activities)?

during the demobilization program, there have been a number of cases where children, their families, and community leaders have protested and reported recruitment abuses to program officers. Still, both parties continue to violate national and international law in recruiting child soldiers.

While advocacy, family reunification, and policies that prevent re-recruitment help curb the use of children as soldiers, greater attention and expanded strategies are critical in future programs.

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1 For the humanitarian principles generally, not specifically concerning child soldiers, see, Iain Levine, "Promoting Humanitarian Principles: The Southern Sudan Experience," 1997, London. A Network Paper from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). (www.odi.org.uk)

2 Demobilization exercises often have a "one man, one gun" policy such that combatants are expected to turn in a weapon for admission to an assembly area for demobilization. Demobilization of child soldiers should not be tied to such weapons collection criteria, but should be a priority in its own right.

3 See Angola case study.

2

Demobilization

The term demobilization may refer broadly to the process of leaving an armed group and integrating into civil society.[1] In this paper, demobilization refers to the release or discharge of child soldiers, their reception, and the initial assistance provided them to return to their home community or other place of settlement. Reintegration, in the following chapter, refers to the transition process to civilian roles through training and assistance programs.

Demobilization may refer to a formal exercise or a variety of informal occasions. Formal demobilization, including for child soldiers, usually follows a peace agreement but may also occur as part of a military restructuring. Informal occasions include instances where child soldiers escape from or are released by their armed group, whether spontaneously or because of advocacy or other circumstances. For example, child soldiers found as prisoners of war have been demobilized. Informal occasions also include gaining the agreement of a particular armed group to release child soldiers during an ongoing conflict. Such opportunities can be developed but require advance program planning.

Demobilization may be involuntary for child soldiers, and they may fear the transition from military to civilian life and an unknown future. During this kind of transition, it is important to gain the support and encouragement of military and civilian officials, as well as families and communities. Former child soldiers themselves can play a valuable role in counseling their peers.

In this chapter, lessons learned on demobilization are organized under: a) advocacy and the importance of including children in peace agreements and demobilization plans,[2] b) planning, resources and coordination, and c) policy development and program strategies.

Including all child soldiers in peace accords and demobilization processes

Early advocacy is essential to generate political attention and commitment to child soldiers. Silence on the issue and a lack of political will may obliterate the issue of child soldiers and their exclusion from peace processes. In addition, political and military authorities often limit programs to "official, adult combatants." In El Salvador the government insisted that support to ex-combatants was intended for "citizens," meaning those eighteen years or older. A late negotiation resulted in some of those sixteen years and older being included in a land credit program, and proposals were advanced for education or training for some of those fifteen or sixteen years old. No provisions were made for those under fifteen. Likewise, the UN peacekeeping mission in Angola, following the example of Mozambique, tried to limit its mandate and budget to the demobilization of soldiers fifteen years and older.[3] This criterion ultimately was not enforced, but other debates followed.

Determining a child soldier as under eighteen years was finally accepted as national law; but there was intense debate concerning from which date to count someone as being under eighteen years. Most demobilization programs take the date of a peace accord as a practical point from which to determine an underage soldier. But arguments by military officials in Angola resulted in a compromise: "the calendar year of demobilization," more than a year after the peace agreement, was adopted as the baseline for determining who was underage. This resulted in thousands of child soldiers "ageing out" of support programs.

Child soldiers have also been excluded from peace accords and demobilization programs because their status often hides them. If the term soldier is only understood to mean combatant, or if a peace agreement only refers to the demobilization of combatants, many

children and youths, especially girls, serving in so-called support functions will be excluded.

While international law now establishes eighteen years as the minimum age for involvement in conflict,[4] age criteria are artificial to the actual experience of children as soldiers. For socio-cultural reasons, many child soldiers may not know their age, and physical judgments are often inaccurate. Child soldier programs must be sensitive to local social and cultural conceptions of children and youths, their role in society, and stages of development and responsibility. For example, program practitioners in Angola and El Salvador usefully adopted the terms "underage soldier" and "youth combatant" to avoid emotional debates over the term "child" and to clarify understandings about child soldiers.

In view of the duration of many conflicts, those who may be a few years more than eighteen at the time of a peace accord or demobilization exercise will have spent their developing years as a soldier. Like their younger peers, they will have been deprived of the normal skill development and moral socialization gained from families and communities

On the other hand, many child soldiers see their participation as equal to that of the adults and want similar recognition in a demobilization exercise. While attention to the special needs of child soldiers in demobilization programs is vital, questions of age underline the need to see reintegration holistically for a range of war-affected youth.

Advocacy—the need for specific and persistent actions on child soldiers

The exclusion of some child soldiers from demobilization programs because of age, gender, or function can in part be addressed by assuring inclusive, community-based reintegration strategies. But the risk of child soldiers being excluded by demobilization plans raises again the importance of advocacy. In El Salvador, reports and recommendations by consultant teams in the demobilization planning phase were ignored[5] — even though one report, prepared a year in advance of the peace accord, recommended that strategies focus on child soldiers.

Angola offers a positive example of how advocacy can bring the issue of child soldiers into demobilization plans. Even though child soldiers in Angola were omitted from the peace agreement, the demobilization commission's first resolution gave child soldiers priority and adopted procedures for their demobilization and reintegration. This advocacy achievement subsequently faced eighteen months of delay but remained an important reference point in the push to make child demobilization a reality.

In the effort to bring attention to the rights and needs of child soldiers, program partners in Angola engaged a range of influential policy actors. A UN consultant team's recommendations were prepared in time for the first funding appeals. The Special Representative of the Secretary General to Angola promoted the issue of demobilizing child soldiers. Reports on obstructions and delays to child demobilization were included in the Secretary General's reports to the Security Council. The embassies of influential donor governments drew attention to child soldiers through their roles in the peace process. The lesson learned was that child protection concerns require the active participation of all political and humanitarian offices. Concern for child soldiers required high-level political attention; otherwise, the matter risked being lost in the peace process.

Such high level political attention can be difficult to maintain. Again, in Angola, UNITA manipulated the quartering process for child recruitment for months despite monitoring and appeals by child advocates (see below). Both parties in Angola were violating elements of the peace accord, but the UN and international community were committed to make the peace process, and especially demobilization, a success. Rather than advocating child protection concerns, the strategy was to use positive encouragement in meetings with the parties. After almost a year, when UNITA's abuses were painfully evident, the UN finally suspended the child soldier demobilization and insisted on a series of policy and procedural changes.

Reaching and recognizing all child soldiers

While some child soldiers will participate in formal demobilization exercises with adults, many will be excluded because of age, gender, or function. Contingency planning is especially important to reach girls and disabled child soldiers.

In Angola, the separation of the "military war disabled" program meant that the child soldiers program accessed only "able-bodied" child soldiers. It is believed that most disabled child soldiers independently returned to their communities.

The numbers game

The logistics of preparing for demobilization and media pressure often fuel considerable discussion about the number of child soldiers. While data on child soldiers may help explain the extent of the problem, their actual numbers may never be known. Many will be excluded from "counts," and in lengthy conflicts a large proportion of children may be involved in some way.

While acknowledging that estimates are important for budget preparations, more essential to demobilization is the early mobilization of a community-based support network to ensure family reunification and psychosocial support. The establishment of such a network could diminish debates about the number of child soldiers, since it can accommodate any increase or decrease in their actual number throughout the demobilization and reintegration process.

Child soldiers want to be recognized and included in formal demobilization programs. When child soldiers are excluded, resentment and a sense of abandonment lead some to return to violence as a way of improving their lives. Former child soldiers in El Salvador, for example, feel betrayed by the demobilization program and by their former commanders. As one former child soldier in El Salvador said, "We young people were not recognized in any way... This was the worst that could have happened to me and my comrades..."

For others, recognition plays an important protection role. In Uganda, the security clearance and document that former child soldiers receive gives them the confidence to return to their communities without suspicion. In an informal demobilization in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, former child soldiers asked for demobilization documentation in order to protect themselves from re-recruitment or from being charged as deserters.

Appropriate demobilization benefits packages for child soldiers

Looking to the Mozambique experience, where child soldiers expressed resentment about being excluded from demobilization exercises, program partners in Angola insisted that all child soldiers access demobilization benefits. Planning thus included that benefits could be claimed and processed at the local level as well as through the formal demobilization process.[6]

While ensuring benefits equity between child and adult demobilizing soldiers, there should be a recognition too of the special needs of child soldiers and supports appropriate to their community situation. In some cases, benefits packages for child soldiers have been seen as way of honoring their participation, while ignoring justice for the victims. In another turn, benefits (such as food supplements and indemnity payments) may not play the reintegration role that humanitarian programs hoped for: In a number of cases, families and foster caregivers rejected child soldiers once their benefits package ran out.

Although most child soldiers want to be treated in the same way as adult soldiers, they often lack civilian life experience in gaining the social, cultural, and livelihood skills necessary to their future. In most demobilization exercises, child soldiers should receive a benefits package equitable to that of demobilizing adults[7]—but program planning must harmonize benefits packages with reintegration strategies.

Planning, resources, and coordination

Advance planning is vital to demobilization and reintegration. In many instances, peace negotiations and demobilization planning proceed outside the humanitarian programming framework vital to child soldiers. In Liberia, humanitarian programs had to rush to meet demobilization plans and agreements. In both Angola and El Salvador, a consultant team engaged in advance of the peace accord brought early attention to child soldiers. Although their recommendations were ignored in El Salvador, Angola took up a special program framework for child soldiers and made it a priority in the demobilization. Planning must be in view of the full process of demobilization and reintegration. Planning for demobilization must not only take into account supplies for reception centers, but also mobilize policy coherence, staffing, partnerships. and resources.

The demobilization of child soldiers must correspond with adult demobilization processes and emphasize community rebuilding. Program planning should reflect analysis of the local circumstances of child recruitment and the experiences and roles of child soldiers in a country experience. For example, as part of growing up, have children participated within an armed movement? were they forcibly recruited? are they known to have committed atrocities?

Mobilizing resources and partnerships—appropriate staffing and procedures

Advance preparations for staffing, training, and other resources are essential in demobilization planning. In a number of instances in Liberia, agencies scrambled to deploy staff and programs to demobilization sites at only several days notice.

In Angola, delays in staff training and deployment caused a delay of almost two years—one year after the peace accord—before quartering commenced, and a further ten months while child soldiers languished in the quartering areas. Despite having commissioned an advance consultant team to plan the demobilization, an ill-prepared three-person team had to circulate among fifteen quartering areas to register thousands of child soldiers. Because the team had inadequate language skills, military commanders served as interpreters, manipulating the children's registration data to serve re-recruitment purposes.

INTERVIEWING CHILD SOLDIERS. The question of language skills and military control in the Angola quartering areas raises issues of confidentiality, freedom of expression, and the veracity of interviews with child soldiers. Raising sensitive issues during initial interviews may expose child soldiers to threats or retaliation. A child's war experiences should neither be exploited during this time by media or public interviews.

Following a series of aborted demobilizations in Liberia, program practitioners concluded that asking child soldiers about their traumatic experiences during the demobilization phase was inappropriate and fruitless because of the child's high level of fear and mistrust. In a positive point from Angola, interviews during the demobilization phase focused on family reunification data and immediate needs. Psychosocial symptoms and questions about the child's experience were left to the reintegration phase when family and social workers provided consistent follow-up support to the child.

Other resource mobilization difficulties in Angola concerned data management. The system for gathering family tracing data through the registration process and managing the analysis necessary for transportation and other logistics was cumbersome and inefficient. The resources of the UN database team were simply over-stretched.[8]

MOBILIZING AN APPROPRIATE NETWORK OF PROGRAMS. A significant degree of reintegration program planning must be part of demobilization planning. Planning should be based on an analysis of how child soldiers can be integrated into a comprehensive framework of family tracing, psychosocial support, and community-based skill-building opportunities.

In Angola, program partners anticipated that child soldiers could be incorporated into the existing family tracing and psychosocial programs without additional staff or resources. But this was inadequate, and, belatedly, a community-based network of social promoters was mobilized, which proved invaluable to family tracing and psychosocial support needs.

Demobilization planning must include the development of extensive program partnerships. Such partnerships will ensure that the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers reaches the community level. In Angola, a network of social promoters, which consisted of partnerships formed with the Church and other local associations, was a singular success. The partnerships were developed following an analysis of which social structures were neutral and had the capacity to provide support to child soldiers at the community level. (See Chapter 3 for more on the Angola network.)

Coordination and institutional issues

Unfortunately, leadership and coordination roles in child demobilization often suffer because of confusion and disagreement among agencies. Given the complexity of military, humanitarian, and child-specific aspects to demobilization, it is usual that a variety of agencies with some degree of overlapping mandates be present. Despite this, the locus of coordination and policy leadership has been well served by UN agencies, especially in regard to the persistent advocacy necessary at multiple political levels. Thus, effective coordination between UN offices with overall political, military, and humanitarian roles and those with child-specific roles and expertise is essential.

In Angola, program partners created a technical coordination committee to focus on issues for the child soldiers program distinct from, but related to, the more politicized full demobilization exercise and peace process. An important characteristic of the coordination committee was its inclusiveness. Under joint coordination by UNICEF and the overall UN coordination office, membership included the government social

affairs ministry, representatives of both parties to the conflict, international non-governmental organizations, and local associations.

Coordination is also essential for the extensive logistical aspects of family tracing, reunification, and follow-up support to child soldiers. Representatives of each partner in the Angola technical coordination committee met weekly as a provincial-level committee. These weekly meetings helped coordinate family reunification details, developing solutions for child soldiers whose families could not be traced, and creating individually appropriate education or income-generating opportunities for the child soldiers.

Policy coherence and program strategies

Agencies and partners spend a good deal of time debating policy development and program strategy. Debates include the basis of determining age, how to separate child soldiers from military authority, the process needed for family reunification and community acceptance, the role of trauma interventions, and whether special centers are needed for child soldiers.

Policy debates on the age for determining a child soldier have already been mentioned. For example, in Angola, the legal framework emphasized the national legal recruiting age of eighteen years as the age for determining child soldiers but compromised in taking the "calendar year of demobilization" rather than the year of the peace agreement as the basis from which to determine who is considered under eighteen.

Policy debates clearly overlap with program strategy debates. In Angola, there was considerable debate about whether child soldiers should be included with adults in the demobilization quartering areas and barracks, or if special reception centers should be created. Advocates for trauma programs questioned the proposed strategy of rapid family reunification and community-based supports for reintegration. A foreign government proposed creating special military academies for child soldiers, instead of family reunification.

The issue of special centers is a challenge to program practitioners. The debates center on how to separate child soldiers from military authority, assure their effective protection, and allow for a process of family reunification and community acceptance, and the role of trauma or special training programs.

The question of establishing special centers arises in both the demobilization and reintegration phase. During demobilization, there is the question of how

to receive child soldiers and ensure their interim care pending family tracing. Especially within the context of ongoing tensions, child soldiers need to be protected from re-recruitment, retribution, abuse, and stigmatization. In the reintegration phase, center-based care may be proposed —in the event that family reunification proves unsuccessful—for trauma counseling or as an efficient locale for training.

Protection during demobilization—the question of "centers"

Establishing special reception centers for child soldiers during demobilization is an important protection measure. In most cases, special reception centers will be a way of separating child soldiers from military authority and protecting them from re-recruitment or further abuse.

In Angola, mixing UNITA child soldiers with adults in the quartering areas for demobilization was an alarming experience. UNITA commanders manipulated the demobilization process in order to move child soldiers back into UNITA training camps, and new child soldiers were recruited to meet quartering targets. Of 8,613 child soldiers registered in the UNITA quartering areas, only 57 percent could be tracked for demobilization and family reunification.

This is a clear example of inadequate child protection in the demobilization process and of where separate reception centers should have been established. In Liberia, 89 percent of child soldiers in the 1996–1997 demobilization "wandered away" from demobilization sites. Many returned to their commanders, some "voluntarily" and some by force. In another example from Liberia, some former child soldiers were prematurely returned to home areas controlled by opposing factions, resulting in a number of children being arrested and flogged.

While there may be situations where child soldiers can be protected within adult demobilization processes, careful monitoring is required to ensure effective transition from military to civilian control. In Angola, a small group of child soldiers associated with government forces were grouped in special barracks for demobilization. Program partners had free access to the children for counseling, family tracing, health care, and other immediate steps towards reintegration. While this demobilization experience was relatively positive, hundreds of child soldiers were held back from the demobilization in other barracks. In El Sal-

vador, child soldiers associated with the government[9] were held in barracks pending demobilization, but were excluded from support programs while the military denied their existence.

Some child soldiers join armed groups for protection and form strong emotional attachments to their military commanders.[10] In El Salvador, many youths joined the FMLN following attacks on their communities by government-affiliated forces. Many children virtually "grow up" within an armed movement. In such contexts, it is especially important to engage the support of military authorities in counseling child soldiers on demobilization and establishing a civilian life. While these child soldiers may be less vulnerable to re-recruitment or other abuse by their military commanders, separate demobilization procedures should still be established to facilitate their rupture with military identity.

Centers may also be necessary because the military provides little information, and children may not know their family's location, or if they are alive. Children may be apprehensive about leaving the military and about how they will be received by their family and community. As in good practice for family tracing generally, it is vital to prepare the family and child for reunification.

In Uganda, former child soldiers abducted by the rebel force pass through a military barracks and then NGO reception center before returning to relatives and the community. They receive a "security clearance" letter from the military and the center attesting to their passage and civilian status. As expressed by one former child soldier: "the letter given to us by the military makes us feel secure [...] means we are now a normal member of the community."

The temporary need for special reception centers must be reconciled with the inherent risk of centers to stigmatize or marginalize child soldiers. Reflecting their strong desire for normalcy, former child soldiers in Liberia resented being labeled "war affected." And centers are contrary to the need to emphasize family and community links in the process of transition to civilian life.

Lessons learned in other countries demonstrate that reception centers can be organized in ways that model family and community life. Transit centers for the 1996–1997 demobilization in Liberia provided only the basic necessities in line with the means of the sur-

rounding community. Earlier transit centers provided full-service care, and created resentment of the special treatment given to child soldiers. In a 1993 demobilization in Sierra Leone, homes for demobilized children modeled family care, including chores and contact with the surrounding community.

In other cases, child soldiers have been demobilized into foster settings rather than transit centers or group care. The Angola network members provided interim care in their homes pending family tracing or arrangements for fostering or independent living.

There should be measures to ensure that temporary center arrangements do not become long-term solutions. For example, in a local demobilization in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in 1997, officials requested a full-board vocational school. Program officers argued for an emphasis on family reunification and community-based support. The result was a reception center, supported with a time limit of two months. By the end of the two months, only thirteen child soldiers, whose families could not be traced, remained in the center and foster arrangements were made for their ongoing care.

Work in Uganda[11] has identified the following key elements for center-based interim care of former child soldiers:

- All staff must be provided training[12] on child development, child rights, and the effects of war on children.
- All staff, from managers to guards to cooks, must be aware of the role-model they represent for the children—especially in demonstrating accountability, trustworthiness, and honesty.
- The center must assure adequate protection, including security arrangements against re-recruitment, retribution, or abduction as well as measures to prevent further distress. such as stigmatization, isolation, or further abuse.
- Priority should be given to building relationships between the child and his family with the goal of as short a stay as possible in the center.
- Integration into the community should be proactive through family tracing or placement, community sensitization and developing the child's social skills.
- The center should contribute to an appropriate follow-up system, following family reunification or other living arrangements.
- The center should be culturally appropriate, including traditional healing and spiritual measures.

Demobilization lessons checklist

- Are child soldiers specifically included in the peace agreement?
- Are there specific provisions for child soldiers in demobilization plans?
- Are political leaders, UN officials, peacekeeping forces, and national NGOs included in advocacy on behalf of child soldiers?
- Has a legal framework been developed that includes the child's right to be demobilized, not considered a deserter, and exempt from future service?
- Do terminology and program approaches incorporate local social and cultural values on children and youth?
- Are the particular needs of girls and the disabled taken into account?
- Which benefit packages are appropriate for child soldiers? Are they equitable to benefits for adults demobilized? Are supports oriented to re-gaining civilian life rather than "rewards"?
- If child soldiers participate in the assembly process with regular troops for demobilization, how can their departure be as rapid as possible so as to separate them from military authority?
- How will demobilized child soldiers be received? Since temporary centers are often necessary, how can they model on family-based care and how can family tracing be maximized? Alternatively, are foster systems available instead?
- Are effective measures adopted to ensure the protection of child soldiers during demobilization (e.g., protection from re-recruitment, revenge or retributive attacks, or discrimination or harassment)?
- Do interviews and registration during demobilization focus on family tracing and other immediate needs? Are the child's experiences during the conflict and psychosocial impacts being addressed in a supportive reintegration context?
- Are tracing and psychosocial programs adequately mobilized and funded?
- Are program partnerships established for psychosocial support, education, and livelihood opportunities?
- Are appropriate staff (considering language skills, community rapport, and experience working with youth) recruited and trained?
- Is there a community-based strategy to support child soldiers that may escape or be released outside of formal demobilization?
- Are links made between supports for child soldiers and programs for those disabled by war?

- Child soldiers should be part of the care system, forming relationships and engaging in roles and tasks appropriate to daily family life,
- Psychosocial support activities should provide health care as well as basic needs.
- The center should help develop a new identity for the children through cultural activities, spiritual initiatives, sports, individual guidance, and peer-group activities.
- The center should have an open style and seek a wide range of community links and resources.
- Staff should be supported with ongoing capacity building and stress management support.

Working with child soldiers can be extremely difficult. They often have highly inflated expectations, exaggerated pride in their military identity, and have learned to rely on aggression to meet needs and solve problems. In some cases, child soldiers have stolen material goods from centers or returned to the military to obtain drugs or seek sexual partners. As shown in Uganda, program staff are often unprepared to address issues such as drug abuse or sexually transmitted diseases in child soldiers and, therefore, need consistent support.

Adequate investments must be made in staff training and establishing partnerships with relevant health, psychosocial, and educational programs. These partnerships should form the network of supports and opportunities to regain education and livelihood skills for the former child soldier's ongoing reintegration upon leaving the center.

The question of centers as part of reintegration

There has been considerable debate about the role of special centers as part of reintegration strategies for child soldiers. Angola addressed a proposal to create a special military school instead of demobilizing child soldiers to their families and home communities. Such proposals are not uncommon—both Uganda and

Rwanda have experience with such approaches. The Uganda experience in the 1980s was not evaluated, but reports indicate that the majority of the "demobilized" child soldiers ran away, resorted to delinquent behavior, or returned to military life. The Rwanda experience underscores the risk of short-term centers becoming long-term solutions.

In Angola, program partners argued against creating special centers for child soldiers for both demobilization and reintegration, emphasizing the following arguments:

- Family reunification or a family-based setting is an essential first step in the social reintegration process for child soldiers.
- The socio-economic life of a community serves as an anchor in the transition from military identity and violence to civilian life.
- Special centers create artificial ghettos disconnected from the dynamics of civilian life.
- Child soldiers in such centers would be stigmatized as "trauma cases."

Some argue that child soldiers need special trauma programs before making the transition to family and community life. Experience advises to the contrary— that is, psychosocial support through the family and community environment is the most effective. (Lessons learned on the need for a psychosocial approach are developed further in the next chapter.) In lessons learned from Liberia, it was thought that less than 5 percent of the former child soldiers needed special psychological support.

Other arguments presented in favor of center-based reintegration strategies include: claims that the children are orphans, that they will not be accepted in their communities because of atrocities committed, or that their surviving family members are too poor to take them back. Others argue that special health or training programs are best provided in centers.

In Angola, the Ministry of Social Affairs had already adopted a non-institutional policy for unaccompanied children and had foster and independent living projects. International child welfare practice consistently concludes that institutional settings are inappropriate to the emotional, social, and cultural development needs of children. The CRC provides an important reference on the many development needs of children not met by even the best-funded facilities: emotional development, stable adult relationships, integration with community, cultural traditions and values, and preparation for roles and responsibilities upon leaving for independent adult lives.

While centers are often necessary in the demobilization phase, lessons learned in reintegration re-emphasize the need to ensure as short a stay as possible. Child soldiers themselves express a preoccupation with being accepted by their family and community. For example, in Uganda, former child soldiers reported that one of their greatest fears was that their families would not visit them. One reporting, "this gives us much pain; we fear they hate us."

Because of the role children have played in many conflicts, a careful process of community acceptance and family reintegration is vital. This underscores the importance of harmonizing child soldier programs with community rebuilding. Experience shows that effective reintegration depends most on family reunification, an emphasis on psychosocial supports and community rebuilding, and access to skill-building activities.

1 Annex III provides a discussion of the terms demobilization and reintegration.

2 As has been called for by the Secretary General of the United Nations in his Report to the Security Council, S/2000/101, 11 February 2000.

3 This followed Article 38 of the CRC previous to the adoption of the May 2000 Optional Protocol. See Annex II for further discussion.

4 See Annex II for further discussion of the legal framework for child soldiers.

5 See El Salvador case study.

6 *Demobilization benefits in Angola were otherwise distributed on a specific "demobilization day" at the specific quartering site. Because many child soldiers would be afraid to present themselves on this day or would not have been sent for demobilization by their commanders, program officers arranged to receive child soldiers and give them their benefits packages at provincial locales.*

7 In Angola, child soldiers received the same cash and materials benefits package as adults plus an additional $50 stipend.

8 The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has initiated a new database for work with unaccompanied children that presents a potential resource to future work with child soldiers. Experimentation with software and new technologies have created the ability to incorporate digital photos within data records, keep designated fields secure for protection and confidentiality concerns, and allow multiple partners to harmonize data. IRC and Save the Children (UK) are currently piloting the database.

9 A question largely uninvestigated in El Salvador concerns "orphaned" children taken into military barracks for "care" following bombing raids and other operations. A number of cases have been traced to profit-making, "black market" foreign adoptions involving military officials. (Cfr. Tina Rosenberg, "What did you do in the war, mama?", The New York Times Magazine, 7 February 1999.)

10 While some point to cases where sexual relationships with commanders become long-term relationships, most relations are a further abuse and exploitation of the child soldier. The emotional attachment referenced here should not be confused with such relations; it encompasses the emotional attachment some child soldiers develop with their commanders in the absence of parental and other normal socialization roles by other relatives and community members.

11 Elizabeth Jareg and Lenhart Falk, "Steps in the development of a monitoring and evaluation system for center and community-based psychosocial work with war-affected children in Uganda." Report of a consultation between Save the Children Norway and Denmark with the Gulu Support the Children Organization, May 1999 (unpublished document).

12 The Angola case study provides example training outlines.

3

Reintegration

While demobilization represents the point at which a child leaves military life, reintegration represents the process of establishing a civilian life. Reintegration programs need to support the child in constructing a new, positive course of development.

The child soldier's development will have been affected in many ways by his or her experience in armed conflict. The context of their family and community life will likely have changed because of increased poverty, the death of family members and friends, displacement, and perhaps resettlement. This raises the question of what is meant by the terms reintegration, reinsertion, recovery, and rehabilitation. Reintegration to what? The reality is a matter of adjusting to new circumstances. The process is complex and should include a multitude of inter-related issues: health and basic needs, psychosocial support, a family context, establishing positive relationships, and opportunities for education and income generation. The combination of these elements—balancing social and economic factors—is essential. Experience shows three things fundamental to successful reintegration:

1) Family reunification and an inclusive community environment

2) Psychosocial support

3) Opportunities for education and livelihood.

Family reunification and community-based networks

The demobilization chapter has shown that family reunification or alternative family-based living arrangements, rather than centers, are the most effective reintegration strategy. Experience consistently demonstrates that family and community relationships are the most important factors in the reintegration of child soldiers.

In a follow-up survey of former child soldiers in El Salvador, 84 percent reported that their family played the most important role in their transition to civil life.

Considering that 41.6 percent of the child soldiers had lost one or both parents during the conflict, this finding was contrary to expectations. This is especially significant in view of the absence of a family tracing program for child soldiers.

Other child soldiers, 9.6 percent, in the El Salvador follow-up survey, said that friends were the most important factor in their transition. Former child soldiers in Uganda also stressed the importance of friends. Many reported in focus groups that they would seek advice from friends first but also reported their mothers as their choice for discussing "deep problems."

Skepticism about the prospects for family reunification is often high in the aftermath of conflict. But, as noted in El Salvador, experience demonstrates that family tracing can have surprising success. In Angola, despite the resumption of conflict, only 6 percent of the thousands of former child soldiers whose cases could be followed up were living alone or with non-related foster families.

The prospect of former child soldiers living independently or having children, with or without a partner, must be addressed proactively in reintegration programs. Of the Angolan former child soldiers living "alone," many have new families because they married and/or had children during the conflict. Among child soldiers in the El Salvador follow-up survey, 56 percent reported that their family situation changed after the war because of new ties. Almost half of the former child soldiers, 47.9 percent, were married or with a partner, and 58.7 percent had children.

One of the most important support projects in Angola was a "self-building project," in which former

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The Kadogo School in Rwanda

In October 1994, following UNICEF advocacy, the Rwandan Ministry of Defense announced a plan to create a special military school for the demobilization of child soldiers. Child soldiers were referred to as "kadogos," meaning "little ones" in Swahili. It was argued that these children could not return home because many had lost their families and that their attitudes would cause problems for reintegration.

With support from UNICEF and other NGOs, the Kadogo School, a full-board facility, opened in June 1995. The intake quickly rose to 2,922—more than twice the number expected. Only 41 teachers and 15 social workers had been engaged to work at the school. The program became overwhelmed with providing schooling and basic needs. By November 1996, only 400 had been reunited with their families.

Following an evaluation in 1997, agencies and the government have worked to emphasize family reunification, community-based follow-up, and changing the school/center over to alternative uses.

The school was closed in 1998, with many of the children transferred to secondary schools. No follow-up surveys were undertaken to trace the kadogos' transition to civilian life.

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child soldiers and their new families were supported in home construction. An essential project component of community integration was that either family or community leaders gave the land for the new homes.

This is not to say that family reunifications always go smoothly. Staff working with child soldiers need to develop family mediation and community mobilization skills. A demobilized child soldier is no longer the child he or she was before recruitment, and both the child and family have to adjust to new roles, expectations, and hardships. In Angola, 16 percent of the cases followed up had left their care situation after reunification. Some moved to an urban area as a means of self-protection from re-recruitment or to access vocational training, but others moved due to family relationship problems.

There may also be concerns about whether a family or community will accept a former child soldier, especially if child soldiers have been involved in killings or rape. In Northern Uganda, families feared that reunited child soldiers would attract the attention of rebels in future attacks. Children themselves in Uganda note the importance of cleansing ceremonies so that their communities do not view them as *cen* or "contaminated." Supporting these socio-cultural processes is especially important for girls who have been forced to serve as "wives" to rebels. These girls and their children may face the long-term concern of being considered a poor marriage prospect.

On the other hand, the concern that former child soldiers will be refused by their families or communities can be overstated. In Angola, practitioners quickly learned that families recognized that acts committed by child soldiers were the responsibility of the adults who recruited them. Among former child soldiers followed up in El Salvador, 98.5 percent reported that their family relations were good or very good, and only 6.6 percent reported that they had difficulties being accepted by the community upon demobilization.

Indeed, the reintegration of child soldiers faces a challenging process of reconciliation and mediation. Family and community reintegration takes time and must allow for an appropriate process of acceptance and new roles. The role of traditional ceremonies and special attention for girls is discussed further below.

Community mobilization is as important as the more technical tracing and logistics of family reunification. Lessons learned emphasize that post-conflict recovery must emphasize psychosocial support activities as well as physical needs. In Liberia, program practitioners had to invest in community coping mechanisms and welfare structures rather than the traditional emphasis on physically rehabilitating schools and clinics.

Angola provides a successful example of a community-based network to support the reintegration of child soldiers: a partnership with some 200 church social promoters called "catechists." The catechist network achieved family reunification, follow-up support, and monitoring despite immense challenges caused by the country's size, difficult terrain, and problems with landmines and security. In sum, the catechists:

- were perceived to be neutral by all parties
- provided a sense of authority and a structure independent from political-military leaders
- adhered to humanitarian and child rights principles within social welfare services
- had the capacity for outreach and communication to difficult areas

- were respected by the community, in part because catechists were often the only literate person in the village
- were a permanent support for demobilizing child soldiers and their families because the catechists were from local villages, spoke local languages, and knew the local culture.

Such a network does not necessarily require extensive outside funding. The Angola program gave the catechists training, nominal monthly payments, and logistical and technical support. The churches and other network partners received no compensation and contributed their own resources in the form of training venues and short-term accommodation during family reunification processes. Those who provided interim foster care for child soldiers were not compensated.

Working with churches may not always be the best choice for programs seeking to identify appropriate social structures and partnerships. However, the features of the Angola catechist network—neutrality, outreach capacity, commitment, local knowledge, and sustainability—give practitioners a transferable model. And, although programs often neglect the child's right to participation, the Angola network allowed the child soldiers and their families to participate in determining reintegration needs and supports.

Psychosocial approach and traditional healing

Child soldiers experience a process of asocialization in armed conflict. As a national NGO in El Salvador explains, child soldiers have been "socialized into a polarized existence of hostility."[1] They are deprived of the normal cultural, moral, and values socialization usually gained from family and community. These elements have to be restored during the reintegration process.

The reintegration of child soldiers raises difficult psychosocial questions. Adolescence is a time of establishing identity, and the child soldier may resist changing this identity from soldier to civilian. Demobilized child soldiers model their behavior on the violence and assertiveness learned in armed conflict. Overcoming the mistrust they learn can be difficult. This is why reintegration programs must emphasize the opportunity to form positive, trusting, consistent relationships with adults, with an emphasis on a family-based environment. (This again points to impor-

What is psychosocial?

The diverse and often violent experiences of armed conflict have profound effects on child development and well-being. The word "psychosocial" simply underlines the dynamic relationship between psychological and social effects, each continually influencing the other. "Psychological effects" are those which affect emotion, behavior, thoughts, memory, learning ability, perceptions, and understanding. "Social effects" refer to altered relationships caused by death, separation, estrangement and other losses, family and community breakdown, damage to social values and customary practices, and the destruction of social facilities and services. Social effects also extend to the economic dimension as many individuals and families become destitute through the material and economic devastation of armed conflict, thus losing status and place in their social network.

tant lessons from the Angola catechist network: they provided an immediate, respected, and trusted contact point for child soldiers from reception through reintegration.)

Experience shows that psychosocial approaches are more beneficial than Western-derived trauma assistance. The very definition of psychosocial[2] emphasizes that psychological process takes place in a social context, with family and community. In many cultures, child development is more socio-centric than egocentric. In El Salvador, for example, mental health is considered the harmonization of physical, emotional, and community well-being. One community developed an annual ceremony to honor the deceased and renew awareness of the impact of the conflict in community terms. Community solidarity provides recognition, acceptance, and historical place for individual experiences of grief and trauma.

Community-based measures have been successful in addressing cases of psychosocial distress in other country experiences. Reflecting on lessons learned, counselors in Liberia estimated that less than 5 percent required special psychological care. NGOs in El Salvador put such estimates at less than 2 percent. Group counseling, incorporating collective conflict resolution approaches, was the most effective. Small group sessions emphasizing expression and reflection were also found to be effective in El Salvador. Discussion themes included: militarism, self-identity, family,

community, religion, and the future. Techniques used in the sessions included drawing, making collages and masks, photos, story-telling, and dramatization

Program practitioners in Liberia found the most important reintegration factors to be: a "normal" environment, a sense of forgiveness through religious and cultural ceremonies, and family reunification. The program in Angola placed culture at the center of addressing the psychosocial impacts of conflict, including traditional healing rituals for child soldiers. The rituals provide acceptance of the child, assuage the ill spirits associated with the child soldier's actions during conflict, and reconcile the child with ancestral spirits. Similarly in Northern Uganda, former child soldiers report that traditional cleansing ceremonies are important so that the whole community understands they are "decontaminated."

While guarding against any harmful effects of the rituals, reintegration programs should support appropriate measures identified by the community. Some question the degree to which a ceremony "cleanses" a former child soldier, but the value of these processes to family and community is important to healing and post-conflict recovery.[3]

In Angola, a pre-established psychosocial program promoted community sensitization and provided training and support to the catechist network.[4] The specific roles of the catechists were:

- Facilitate, through program finances if needed, ceremonies with traditional healers
- Provide follow up visits and family mediation to the youths and their families
- Facilitate contacts with *sobas* (traditional community leaders) and other community members to hold welcome ceremonies and raise awareness of the needs and rights of child soldiers
- Help children access education, work, or training opportunities through locally available or internationally funded projects.

A psychosocial approach underscores the synergy gained by supporting physical health and activity, cognitive, emotional, and moral development. Indeed, while family support was vital to the reintegration of child soldiers in El Salvador, the absence of complementary psychosocial supports, education or economic opportunities hindered reintegration. Many former combatants contribute to the marked growth of urban

gangs and organized crime in El Salvador, showing the link between unsuccessful reintegration and social violence. Such examples pose significant concern for post-conflict societies.

Education and economic opportunity

The third essential component to reintegration is access to education and economic opportunity. This is linked to the psychosocial component because establishing a new identity for the child soldier will depend on productive activities and new learning. Identity and positive meaning in their civilian life is gained through appropriate, contributive roles in their families and communities.

Education and economic activity should be linked to broader rehabilitation efforts, and program frameworks must include family livelihood needs. Project examples in Angola included supporting bakeries for former child soldiers and their families, and supporting apprenticeships through material assistance to artisans or businesses.

Experience teaches that a balance must be achieved between the child soldier's need to earn income and the need to resume education. Access to education is one of the most often requested supports by child soldiers but often forgone for economic reasons. The key aspects to education and economic opportunity in reintegration programs are:

- Accelerated formal education as well as alternative education modalities
- Supporting livelihood needs with income generating opportunities and market-appropriate vocational training
- Including child soldier reintegration in post-conflict economic policy.

Formal and alternative education

Access to formal education[5] presents special challenges for the reintegration of child soldiers; yet former child soldiers and their families overwhelming see this as the best path to a new future. In Liberia, 77 percent of former child soldiers said they wanted to return to academic schooling. Program practitioners found that formal schooling was preferred even in areas where free vocational and literacy training were offered.

Economic considerations pose the most significant obstacle to education. In El Salvador, livelihood needs in relation to formal education were neglected. Fol-

lowing a difficult negotiation to provide child soldiers fifteen years and older with some supports, more than a year after demobilization, 152 were selected for school enrollment. However, in a survey preceding this selection, only five had sought formal education opportunities. In follow-up research for this working paper, many former child soldiers explained that they would like to study but lacked financial resources and needed to prioritize income generation. As two former child soldiers in El Salvador commented:

"I think that housing and education are what I need, but.... for education, I would like to have a night job so that I could study in the day...."

"Now they do give classes, but I won't go with those little boys..."

Former child soldiers cite many obstacles to reinsertion in formal schooling, including:

- They cannot attend school during formal school hours because they must earn their own income or contribute to the family livelihood.
- They or their families cannot afford the school fees or expenses of uniforms and supplies.
- Education facilities were destroyed during the conflict, or there is a lack of teachers in their community.
- They have difficulty getting documentation for enrollment, or school authorities would not allow older former child soldiers to join the same level as younger children.
- They feel shame or resentment about going to school with much younger children.

A few pilot projects in Angola offer models for future child soldier reintegration programs. Christian Children's Fund, the international NGO partnering with the catechist network, organized an "ID Registration Project" to arrange the civilian documentation essential for school enrollment. The Ministry of Education initiated a network of "animator teachers." The animator teachers work at the community level to identify disabled children out of school, plan their intake with parents, teachers and headmasters, and provide training and support to teachers who assist disabled children with learning difficulties. The catechist network in Angola played a role similar to the animator teachers with child soldiers, and investments in training and awareness raising hold great potential if peace can be regained.

Former child soldiers need education opportunities with flexible hours and an emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills. Training in life skills—including nutrition, sexual and reproductive health, and managing finances—should also be incorporated. These education modalities are gravely lacking in reintegration programs.

Vocational training and income generating opportunities
Soldier reintegration programs to date have offered few meaningful training and livelihood opportunities. In El Salvador, only 23 out of 293 former child soldiers in a follow-up survey reported that they had access to a vocational training project. A few more, forty-four, accessed a land credit project. In Liberia, child soldiers were given "coupons" for future training projects, which rarely materialized.

Reintegration programs have to address the immediate need of most child soldiers for income. Vocational training and small business schemes must also be created for quality and market absorption factors. In El Salvador, evaluations of the program for demobilized adults found only 25 percent working in the area for which they were trained. Problems identified with the training courses in El Salvador included:

- There were no job opportunities upon course completion
- Courses were assigned by political and military leaders rather than selected by the participants themselves, leading to low motivation levels and inconsistent attendance
- The academic level was too high because many participants were illiterate
- There was little orientation or referral at community level to possible opportunities.

Former child soldiers followed-up in El Salvador were pessimistic about their future because of chronic poverty and the lack of socio-economic change in their country. Only 49.5 percent earn their own income; of this, 85 percent earn less than the minimum wage. Some seven years after the peace accord, a few even reported dissatisfaction about being demobilized. This negative experience of economic reintegration is in stark contrast to their motivation for participating in the conflict: to improve the future of their country.

The resumption of conflict in Angola effectively ended reintegration projects; but their experience pro-

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Reintegration lessons checklist

- Is a family tracing system adequately mobilized, staffed, and funded?
- Is adequate time planned for the preparation of child soldiers and their family for reunification?
- Are fostering arrangements available for cases where tracing is not successful?
- Are arrangements for independent living possible, and is funding available?
- How can a community-based psychosocial program be established?
- Are traditional healing practices being identified and supported?
- What social structures can contribute to sustainable monitoring and follow-up?
- Are teachers, health workers, churches, local NGOs, and others being reached by an awareness raising initiative on the rights and needs of child soldiers?
- Are recreational, cultural, religious, and life-skill building activities available and accessible?
- How will access to formal education be facilitated? Are there programs with flexible hours? What policy will be undertaken to support school fees and materials?
- How can family and community small businesses be supported? Are there artisans and trade professionals that could be supported to provide apprenticeships?
- Is the country's economic policy conducive to meeting the livelihood needs of youth and war-affected communities?

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vides insights to effective reintegration strategies. With the support of "Quick Impact Project" funds, known as 'QIPs,'[6] a number of families with demobilized child soldiers were able to rehabilitate bakeries and other small businesses. These projects provide an important example of combining the families' income needs with the needs of the child. Lessons learned in Liberia also note that family poverty alleviation programs are as important as family reunification follow-up visits.

The Angola demobilization and reintegration program also initiated a referral service in each province. These offices arranged a number of apprenticeships for demobilized child soldiers. For example, tailors were given favorable rental terms on sewing machines in exchange for taking apprentices, and training wages were supported in community restaurants.

The Angola apprenticeships and QIP-supported micro-enterprises were more effective than vocational training schemes because they provided a quicker way of acquiring skills and income. Similarly, programs in Liberia had to progress from a core of vocational and literacy training to an emphasis on programs that could run in combination with regular schools.

The experience of the Angola QIP projects and provincial referral structure underscores the need for flexible program funding mechanisms. The ability to develop projects and organize funding at the provincial level was crucial to reaching individual child soldiers and their families.

In addition, the QIPs in Angola had some impact in bringing economic activity to more rural and isolated locations. Locating vocational training projects in urban areas raises the issue of the distribution of economic activity in post-conflict societies, where many communities have significant numbers of demobilized soldiers, repatriating refugees, and other especially war-affected groups.

The link to economic policy

Economic recovery is likely to be precarious in a country's transition from war to peace. This is accentuated by the large number of young adults, including former child soldiers, in need of a means of livelihood. The experience of El Salvador shows how economic policies can run against the needs of ex-combatants and the most war-affected communities.

In El Salvador, industrial policy emphasized export-processing zones—but they were not established in the predominantly rural or semi-urban areas where many combatants re-settled. The strategy for the agricultural sector was to promote the export of specialized crops. Former combatants in the agricultural reintegration program were assigned marginally productive land and did not have the skills, capacity, time, or resources to engage in advanced marketing and credit schemes. Evaluations of the program found that the debt level of former combatants reached 400 percent of an annual rural salary. Clearly, having spent some ten years as a soldier, left the child soldiers especially disadvantaged.

While some economic policy measures may not reach former child soldiers because of their age and level of skill and education, economic policies clearly affect their reintegration prospects. These problems are compounded because former child soldiers often belong to families that meet multiple vulnerability criteria, such as a war-disabled father, widowed mother, or displacement.

Neglected needs of girls and the disabled

As outlined in Chapter 2, child soldier programs must employ community-based strategies that reach girls, the disabled, and other groups that demobilization programs routinely omit. In El Salvador, 33 percent of former child soldiers were girls. While they have not reported stigmatization by family or community in cases where they had sexual relations and children outside of marriage, support programs did not accommodate the needs of female-headed households. The same was true for girls in Liberia.

Like girls, the needs of former child soldiers with disabilities are also often ignored. In El Salvador, a group of disabled former soldiers occupied the legislative assembly in order to make the government fulfill pensions promised under the reinsertion program. In Angola, those working with child soldiers worked in isolation from the military war disabled program. In Liberia, disabled former child soldiers were especially vulnerable to neglect and isolation.

The omission of girls and the disabled by many child soldiers programs underscores the need for community-based approaches supporting the recovery and integration needs of all war-affected children.

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1 Fundacion 16 de Enero, "Los Ninos y Jóvenes Ex-Combatientes en su Proceso de Reinserción a la Vida Civil," 1995. See full case study on El Salvador.

2 The definition provided in the text box was agreed upon at a May 1997 UNICEF workshop including UN and NGO partners. A report of the workshop is available from UNICEF Office of Emergency Programs. A recommended resource on psychosocial programs is Save the Children Alliance, "Promoting Psychosocial Well-Being Among Children Affected by Armed Conflict," London, 1996.

3 For further discussion, see Alicinda Honwana, (1997) "Healing for peace: Traditional healers and post-war reconstruction in Southern Mozambique." *Peace and conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, Vol. 3, 293-305.

4 See the full case study on Angola for training outlines.

5 Reflecting on such questions in Angola, a demobilization official noted that reintegration programs should help former combatants with school fees for their children. The World Bank noted the same of a demobilization exercise in Uganda. (See Coletta et al. in recommended readings.)

6 QIPS were first developed in Nicaragua by UNHCR for communities with large populations of returning refugees.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to provide lessons and guidance for future programs of prevention, demobilization, and reintegration of child soldiers. While prevention is the best solution, the efforts of those working to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers require our full support. Program practitioners, child soldiers, and their families face difficult processes of post-conflict transition. And this transition should not be undermined by a lack of political will or unfulfilled programs of family reunification, or by a lack of psychosocial support and economic and educational opportunity. Former child soldiers striving to achieve a better future—despite ongoing conflict, social violence, and few reintegration supports—demonstrate the possibilities of regaining a productive civilian life.

Lessons learned

Civil society actors, who have a vital role in preventing child recruitment, require external support. The demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers requires persistent advocacy from both civil society and international actors. In addition, child soldiers must be specifically included in peace agreements and processes. The exclusion of child soldiers in the Salvadoran peace process hindered their reintegration, engendered resentment, and left them socially and economically marginalized. In Angola, a formal resolution prioritizing child soldiers proved essential to achieving their demobilization. Other lessons include:

- Child soldiers must be separated from military authority and protected during demobilization. In a number of country experiences, a lack of protection for child soldiers allowed military authorities to manipulate the demobilization process for recruitment. This lesson underscores the wisdom of establishing special reception centers for child soldiers during demobilization.

- Child soldiers should remain in reception centers for as little time as possible. While special centers are necessary in demobilization, experience shows that family reunification and community-based strategies are the most effective in reintegration.

- Community-based networks are essential for sustainable support to demobilized child soldiers and for reaching those excluded, most often girls and the disabled, from formal demobilization.

- Planning for demobilization should encompass the full demobilization and reintegration process, including preparing staff, establishing partnerships, generating resources, and clarifying policy. In Angola, belated staff recruitment and training, inappropriate language skills and interpretation arrangements, and policy debates delayed child soldier demobilization.

- Coordination structures must include all actors— UN, government, representatives of armed groups, NGOs, local social organizations, and child soldiers and their families.

Reintegration of child soldiers should emphasize three components: family reunification, psychosocial support and education, and economic opportunity. Family reunification—or, where that is not possible, foster placement or support for independent living— is crucial to successful reintegration. Psychosocial support, including traditional rituals and family and com-

munity mediation, is central to addressing the asocial and aggressive behavior learned by child soldiers and to helping them recover from distressful experiences. Finally, education and economic opportunities must be individually determined and must include family livelihood needs. In a number of experiences, apprenticeships and micro-enterprise support have been more effective than vocational training. Resources and programs must be able to meet the educational and livelihood needs of child soldiers.

Reintegration requires a reasonable period, at least three to five years, of committed resources.

Other issues

Prevention will require greater investment in practical measures, such as education and non-formal youth activities, and community level advocacy. This paper has identified obstacles to regaining education and provides early indications on the effectiveness of apprenticeship and micro-enterprise strategies in comparison to vocational training centers. However, there must be improvement in programs that combine education and income-generating needs.

The needs of girls used in conflict require much greater program attention. For example, although 33 percent of the child soldiers followed up in El Salvador were female, special program strategies for girls did not exist. While girls in El Salvador have not reported being stigmatized by family or community for having sexual relations and children outside of marriage, support programs must address the needs of female-headed households.

Improved links are needed between child soldier, disability, and mine awareness programs. While programs for the disabled and war-injured were developed in Angola and El Salvador, neither incorporated child soldiers nor adequate child-conscious measures.

The impact of drug use by child soldiers has not been adequately addressed. And, staff working with child soldiers are often ill-prepared for working with child soldiers influenced by drugs and affected by sexually transmitted diseases.

Finally, reintegration efforts face challenges where child soldiers have committed atrocities or war crimes. The child's reintegration faces a complex process in balance with the need of many communities for justice. A number of experiences demonstrate the important role of traditional healing rituals in addressing family and community concerns about a child soldier's actions. Rwanda[1] provides perspective on working with children accused of atrocities. Further program documentation and exchange, especially regarding legal and amnesty provisions, is required in this area.

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1 See "Children, Genocide and Justice: Rwandan Perspectives on Culpability and Punishment for Children Convicted of Crimes Associated with Genocide." Save the Children USA, 1996.

Annex I

Selected Readings

Brett, Rachel and Margaret McCallin, *Children: The Invisible Soldiers*, 2nd edition, Rädda Barnen, 1998.

The book expands research commissioned for the 1996 UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. Save the Children Sweden (Rädda Barnen) has a useful web site, www.rb.se, featuring a newsletter and database on child soldiers.

Cohn, Ilene and Guy Goodwin-Gill, *Child Soldiers: the Role of Children in Armed Conflicts*, prepared on behalf of the Henry Dunant Institute in Geneva, Oxford University Press, 1994.

Colletta, Nat J., Markus Kostner and Ingo Wiederhofer, *The Transition from War to Peace in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Directions in Development, World Bank, Washington DC, 1996.

Colletta, Nat J., Markus Kostner and Ingo Wiederhofer, *Case Studies in War to Peace Transition: The Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Ethiopia, Namibia and Uganda*, World Bank Discussion Paper No. 331, World Bank, Washington DC, 1996.

International Labor Organization, "The Reintegration of Young Ex-Combatants into Civilian Life", prepared for the Expert Meeting on the Design of Guidelines for Training and Employment of Ex-Combatants, Harare, 11-14 July 1995.

United Nations, *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, Report of the Expert of the Secretary General, Graça Machel, UN Document A/51/306 and Add.1, New York, 1996.

UNICEF, "Cape Town Principles and Best Practices on the prevention of recruitment of children into the armed forces and on demobilization and social reintegration of child soldiers in Africa," UNICEF, New York, 1999.

This booklet is the report of the 1997 workshop held with the NGO Working Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF web address: www.unicef.org.

UNICEF Liberia, *The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Liberia: 1994 to 1997: The Process and Lessons Learned*, UNICEF and the US Committee for UNICEF, New York, 1998.

United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in a Peacekeeping Environment,"United Nations, New York, 2000.

This lessons learned paper contributed to the Report of the Secretary General to the Security Council on the Role of United Nations Peacekeeping in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, S/2000/101, 11 February 2000.

Annex II

Legal Framework

Awareness of the law, including empowering children and their families to protest underage recruitment, has proved vital to prevention and advocacy—and legal provisions for child soldiers are an essential basis for demobilization and reintegration programs.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Additional Protocols thereto of 1977 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 are the pillars of the legal framework on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

1949 Geneva Conventions
Additional Protocol I, Article 77
..."Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault..."

Because of its near universal ratification, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides the strongest basis of law and guiding principles on child protection and well-being. The demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers draws specifically on Article 39 of the CRC,

"States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social integration of a child victim of [....] armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child."

Most significantly, in May 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict to the CRC.

The Optional Protocol provides the strongest instrument to date prohibiting the use of those less than eighteen years as soldiers. The Optional Protocol replaces Article 38 of the CRC, increasing the minimum age for direct participation in hostilities to eighteen years from fifteen years. The Optional Protocol includes non-state parties in its prohibitions.

Key provisions of the
Optional Protocol on the Involvement
of Children in Armed Conflict

Article 1
State Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities.
Article 2
State Parties shall ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 years are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces.
Article 3
States Parties shall raise the minimum age in years for the voluntary recruitment of persons into their national armed forces from that set out in Article 38(3) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, taking account of the principles contained in that article and recognizing that under the Convention persons under 18 are entitled to special protection.
[...]
States Parties that permit voluntary recruitment into their national armed forces under the age of 18 shall maintain safeguards to ensure, as a minimum, that:
  a) Such recruitment is genuinely voluntary;
  b) Such recruitment is done with the informed consent of the person's parents or legal guardians;
  c) Such persons are fully informed of the duties involved in such military service, and
  d) Such persons provide reliable proof of age prior to acceptance into national military service.

Article 4
1. Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years.
2. State Parties shall take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment and use, including the adoption of legal measures necessary to prohibit and criminalize such practices.
[...]

An additional international instrument is International Labour Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, adopted unanimously in June 1999. Convention 182 prohibits, *inter alia*, forced or compulsory recruitment of children (persons under the age of eighteen) for use in armed conflict.

Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999
Article 3
"For the purposes of this Convention, the term "the worst forms of child labour" comprises:
a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict [...]"

In addition, the Statute of the International Criminal Court makes it a war crime to conscript or enlist children under the age of fifteen or use them in hostilities in both international and non-international armed conflicts.

Regional instruments are also important. For countries within the Organization of African Unity, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which provides eighteen as the minimum age for recruitment, is the strongest protection against child recruitment.

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
Article II: For the purposes of this Charter, a child means every human being below the age of 18 years.
Article XXII: Armed Conflicts
[...]States Parties to the present Charter shall take all necessary measures to ensure that no child shall take a direct part in hostilities and refrain in particular, from recruiting any child.
States Parties to the present Charter shall, in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law, protect the civilian population in armed conflicts and shall take all feasible measure to ensure the protection and care of children who are affected by

armed conflicts. Such rules shall also apply to children in situation of internal armed conflicts, tension and strife.

The CRC and African Charter are only binding on governments, not on "non-state parties," such as rebel or armed opposition groups. However, non-state parties may be willing to commit to these instruments. The experience of the humanitarian principles project of Operation Lifeline Sudan (Southern Sector) is recommended for program strategies in reaching non-state parties.[1]

In practice, forced recruitment can be blurred with conscription. While conscription policies are legal, armed forces often resort to forcible means of enforcing conscription, such as rounding up young men in markets and at sports events. Such means are illegal, and many who are underage fall victim to these measures. Child rights monitoring should include mechanisms by which cases of underage recruitment can be redressed.

States are responsible for the recruitment practices of other armed groups they establish, support, or condone—such as civil defense forces, police, special police forces, or local militias. Governments who support non-state parties or allow them to recruit or operate from their territory must ensure that they respect international humanitarian law.

As a policy basis for programs, it is recommended that a legal framework on child soldiers be adopted at each country level. Angola clarifies age, the basis of determining age, and offers a measure to prevent re-recruitment by considering that child soldiers have already met their military service.

Angola Legal Framework
on Underage Soldiers:
• Recognized the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Angolan Law (Law 1/93) providing for 18 years as minimum age for military service;
• 1996 was determined the "calendar year" of demobilization, all soldiers born after 1 January 1978 were to be considered underage;
• As a measure to prevent re-recruitment, all underage soldiers were granted "disponibilidade" status, guaranteeing full exemption from future military service;
• Gave "open status" to all underage soldiers' files, preventing consideration as deserters and guaranteeing right to demobilization and benefits if not present on day of demobilization.

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1 See section 1 of text.

Annex III

Definition of Terms

Program practitioners working with child soldiers often encounter a number of debates related to terminology and applicable law. In Angola, for example, debates over terminology and definition of age obstructed and delayed the demobilization of child soldiers for more than a year.

Demobilization and reintegration often take place in a political context. The multiple government bodies, agencies and organizations involved, frequently with overlapping mandates, may have different understandings of terms, policies, procedures, and program strategies. Clarifying and agreeing upon terms is essential in each program context.

Child soldier

"A child soldier has been defined as any person under 18 years of age who forms part of an armed force in any capacity, and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members, as well as girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage."
Secretary General of the United Nations, Report to the Security Council, S/2000/101, 11 February 2000

Child soldier refers to any person under eighteen years of age who is part of any, regular or irregular, armed force or group. This includes all child or adolescent participants regardless of function. Cooks, porters, messengers, girls recruited for sexual purposes, and other support functions are included as well as those considered combatants. This includes those forcibly recruited as well as those who join voluntarily.

Despite assertions that child soldiers have volunteered, they are often coerced into joining armed groups. Reasons for "joining voluntarily" can include the participation of relatives, threats, bribes, and false promises of compensation. Research has consistently shown that child soldiers join for protection, or for food, clothing, or shelter. These reasons prevent the free choice of the child.

Children are more likely to become child soldiers if they are poor, separated from their families, displaced from their homes, living in a combat zone, or have limited or no access to education. Orphans and refugees are particularly vulnerable to recruitment.

The involvement of children in armed conflict is one of the most egregious violations of child rights. Child development is a dynamic process affected by socialization, cultural values and traditions, gender and ethnicity, emotions, and participation in community life. Children actively construct their own identity and the course of their development, especially during adolescence. The involvement of children in armed conflict has a significant effect on their development, particularly their identity construction, and can lead to social isolation, violence, and reduced education and economic potential.

Because the term "child" often carries the emotional connotation of being a very young and vulnerable person, youth and adolescents may not be seen as child soldiers. The CRC sets eighteen years as the division between child and adult, but many societies use other definitions. Terms such as "youth," as in El Salvador, may be helpful to common understanding in programs. In Angola, the phrase "underage soldier" was adopted to clarify that this included all those under the legal recruitment age of eighteen years.

While most governments have established recruitment laws with an eighteen-year age minimum, there remains an international legal basis for allowing recruitment at younger ages. Historically, Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, Article 77(2), and Additional Protocol II, Article 4(3)(c), provided for a fifteen-year age minimum. This legal norm was subsequently incorporated into Article 38 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In May 2000, following six years of advocacy and negotiation, the UN General Assembly adopted by consensus an Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. The Optional Protocol prohibits the direct participation of all those under eighteen years in armed conflict (see Annex II). However, the Optional Protocol leaves room for governments to set voluntary recruitment ages as young as sixteen years. The varying age minimums continue to leave many children vulnerable to recruitment and have fueled debate about including child soldiers in some demobilization exercises.

The experience of debates over terminology and applicable law illustrates the urgency of

- Advocacy to include all child soldiers under eighteen years in demobilization and reintegration programs
- Community-based approaches to reach child soldiers, especially girls, excluded from formal demobilization exercises
- Incorporating local social and cultural values regarding children and youth.

Demobilization and reintegration programs are often highly politicized and require persistent, coordinated advocacy to ensure the inclusion of the needs and rights of child soldiers.

[...] "The role of children in armed conflict should be acknowledged from the onset of peace negotiations and children's rights should be identified as an explicit priority in peacemaking, peace-building and conflict resolution processes, both in the peace agreement and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration plans."
Secretary General of the United Nations, Report to the Security Council, S/2000/101, 11 February 2000

Demobilization and reintegration
Demobilization and reintegration programs are complex operations that include a number of interdependent issues. The United Nations, and other bodies, use

the phrase *disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR)*.

Disarmament is the collection, control, and disposal of weapons and development of arms management programs. *Demining* is usually included as part of disarmament. Given the interdependent nature of the DDR process, disarmament programs will overlap with concerns for child soldiers. Child-specific concerns with disarmament will include child-oriented mine awareness and weapons safety education. While disarmament is an important child protection concern, this paper focuses on the demobilization and reintegration components as they concern child soldiers.

Demobilization is the process by which armed forces either downsize or disband. Demobilization may take place as a military restructuring in a post war context as well as following a peace accord. Demobilization involves the assembly, disarmament, and discharge of combatants and their compensation or assistance. *Quartering and cantonment* are other terms used for the assembly portion of the process.

The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) defines *reintegration* as an essential concomitant of successful demobilization. Reintegration refers to programs of cash or in-kind compensation, training, and income generation meant to increase the potential for economic and social reintegration of ex-combatants and their families. The compensation packages or assistance programs that accompany discharge are sometimes referred to as *reinsertion*—such that reinsertion would refer to a phase in between demobilization and reintegration. The World Bank for example discusses three phases in the war-to-peace transition: demobilization, reinsertion, and reintegration.[1] *Reinsertion* represents the former combatant's immediate period of returning to their home community or resettlement location, while reintegration refers to long-term social and economic support programs. In some country experiences, such as El Salvador, reinsertion has been used instead of reintegration. This can be a matter of semantics, since in some languages reintegration and reinsertion have the same meaning.

In this working paper, demobilization refers to the reception and discharge of child soldiers and reintegration encompasses measures supporting their process of establishing a new civilian course of development. An emphasis on community-based supports is essential as reintegration involves multiple physical, social, and economic needs beyond any timeframe of cash or other supports.

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1 See recommended reading list, Annex I, for World Bank best practice publications.

Annex IV *Angola and El Salvador*

Summary of Lessons Learned

Phase	Highlights of program actions		Lessons learned
	Angola	**El Salvador**	
Prevention			
Advocacy		• NGOs and Catholic Church helped protest recruitment during conflict	• Support civil service in preventing recruitment and promoting child rights • Include child soldiers in peace processes
Legal framework	• Towards preventing re-recruitment in the demobilization process, developed legal framework with agreed upon definition of an "underage soldier"		• Promote legislation and mechanisms to redress underage recruitment • Establish legal frame-work that includes child's right to be demobilized
Monitoring and documentation	• Study of "vulnerable groups" conducted in demobilization planning	• Early reporting by journalists and advocacy groups on child soldiers and recruitment abuses • Gained parties' agreement to be monitored on their com-mitment to human rights	• Support early documen-tation and reporting on child soldiers • Include non-state parties in seeking commitments and monitoring on human rights
Demobilization			
Advocacy	• Persistent lobbying of UN, parties to conflict resulted in child soldiers being made a priority in the de-mobilization and reintegration plans early on • Prioritized "vulnerable groups," in-cluding child soldiers, in demobili-zation policy and plans • Information campaign regarding demobilization with specific elements on the rights and needs of child soldiers • Developed "open file" mechanism to include child soldiers excluded from formal demobilization	• Early demobilization planning consultants highlighted the needs of child soldiers, but their recom-mendations were ignored • Child soldiers were excluded from reintegration programs; a few were incorporated in a one-year later renegotiation	• Include soldiers in peace agreements and formal demobilization plans • Without political will or specific provision for child soldiers, they will be ex-cluded from demobilization • When child soldiers are not included, they are likely to feel marginalized and resentful • Conduct information cam-paign to promote awareness of child rights

Phase	Highlights of program actions		Lessons learned
	Angola	**El Salvador**	
Planning, resources, and coordination	• Coordination committee inclusive of UN, government, parties to the conflict, NGOs, and local associations • Coordination committee extended to provincial levels • Delayed family tracing work, data coordination and staff deployment • Lack of planning for interpretation and interviews of child soldiers during quartering resulted in manipulation of data for recruitment		• Coordination mechanisms should be inclusive UN, NGOs, donors, government agencies, rep- of all armed groups, and and local organizations • Adequately mobilize staff and program partnerships for family tracing and psychosocial support network
Community involvement	• Community-based network assured a supportive relationship at the village level for child soldiers from demobilization through reintegration	• Family reunification and community acceptance partially compensated for child soldiers' exclusion from formal demobilization	• Community-based networks are essential to reach many former combatants, including those excluded from formal demobilization
Reintegration Family reunification and community-based networks	• Community-based network of "catequistas" effective in family reunification, psychosocial support and facilitating individual insertion into education or livelihood activities • Follow-up to family reunification, including surveys	• Family's role cited as most crucial to social reintegration by former child soldiers	• Community-based networks are effective because they are widely respected and consistently present for follow-up • Follow-up, including family and community mediation and incorporation into education or livelihood projects, is essential
Alternatives to family reunification	• Catequistas provided temporary care and facilitated support for independent living in home communities • Policy decision not to institutionalize child soldiers complemented by project supporting housing construction for independent living		• Develop foster family opportunities and independ, living arrangements in anticipation that some child soldiers will not be able to be reunified with their families • Need to support child soldiers who have formed new families
Psychosocial approach and traditional healing	• Integrated Western and local understanding of healing; supported traditional healing practices • Focus on children's psychosocial needs and development • Catequistas trained and supported by psychosocial project	• Some community-based activities outside the formal reintegration program helped child soldiers, including a few NGO psychosocial projects that supported community	• Emphasize children's psychosocial needs and new civilian development path • Support traditional healing processes; integrate Western and local concepts of healing • Sensitize communities to the needs of child soldiers • Recreational and cultural activities are important

Phase	Highlights of program actions		Lessons learned
	Angola	El Salvador	
Education and economic opportunities	• Quick impact projects to support apprenticeships and creation of new businesses were administered through flexible funding modalities at the provincial level • Micro-enterprise projects in-corporated family livelihood needs as well as the role of the former child soldiers	• The few educational scholarships offered to were not used because child soldiers needed to prioritize income generation	• Need flexible approaches to support child soldiers' education and income-generating needs • Apprenticeships and micro-enterprise approaches were more effective than vocational training • Need to make alterna-tive education and life-skills training available to former child soldiers • Integrate child soldier re-integration with community revitalization • Need to include child soldiers in broader econo-mic policies
Neglected needs of girls and the disabled	• Catequista network and an NGO psychosocial project provided some outreach to girls and the disabled	• 33 percent of ex-soldiers were female, but their specific needs, including the needs of female-headed households, were not ad-dressed in reintegration program	• Include specific attention to girls and the disabled in demobilization • Ensure child-specific measures and linkages between demobilization, disability, and mine injury programs • Draw on community networks and inclusive program partnerships to reach girls and the disabled

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