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PROTECT EDUCATION IN INSECURITY AND CONFLICT  
حماية التعليم في ظروف النزاع وانعدام الأمن

**The Education of Former  
Child Soldiers:  
*Finding a Way Back to  
Civilian Identity***

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## **INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

Former child soldiers frequently express the desire to resume their education or for vocational training. The paper examines the types of programmatic interventions, and the characteristics of successful programmes. These may entail integration into existing school programmes, accelerated learning, or vocational studies. The evidence base is thin on which of these are more cost-effective, but certain principles are clear such as the need to avoid stigmatization and promote inclusion, and the need for long-term financial support. This may be relevant to issues of reparations and can help inform programme design.

Civil wars and international conflicts across the world take a substantial and negative toll on children's physical, social, and psychological wellbeing. Children and youth suffer killings and injuries; they also become refugees or internally displaced persons, separated from homes and families. Still others, boys and girls, are forced or recruited into armed groups as fighters, spies, porters, messengers and cooks. In recent years, scholars and aid workers have paid increased attention to the needs of these combatants and how best to protect them during and immediately after conflict. To that end, humanitarian organizations have developed a range of programmatic interventions to ensure that former combatants make a safe return to families and communities, followed by a successful transition into civilian life.

These interventions, however, have been limited in several ways. In particular, the majority of attention has focused on how best to separate child soldiers from armed groups. Much less attention has been paid to how such children can make successful transitions to civilian life, even though this latter phase is the most challenging and important dimension of programmatic interventions (Chrobok, 2005; Thomas, n.d.). Yet evidence indicates that educating child soldiers is critical to their successful reintegration (Blattman & Annan, 2008; Beber & Blattman, 2011; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007). Indeed, research shows that education is among the prerequisites for a successful transition to civilian life, the others being family reunification and an inclusive community environment, psychosocial support, and (linked to education) livelihood opportunities (Verhey, 2001, p. 15). Despite this recognition, there has been little analysis of the content and quality of education programs, including how best to create access to these programs for former child soldiers, what program attributes are associated with higher educational achievement and stronger learning outcomes, and the associated costs and operational constraints of such programs.

As is made evident in this paper, one reason for this lack of attention to educational interventions may be that programs for reintegrating child soldiers typically take a holistic approach, focusing not just on education, but also on psychosocial support and family and community environment. However, because of the important role that education can play in encouraging both social and economic reintegration, discussed in more detail below, assessment of educational interventions and their attributes and outcomes is important. This paper begins to address this gap by reviewing the available research on education of former child soldiers in order to identify successful program components (content, strategies, and implementation techniques), their potential impact on learner

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<sup>1</sup> EAA would like to thank the authors for their contribution to EAA's work on the protection of education in times of conflict and insecurity.

experiences and outcomes, the challenges these programs encounter, and the relevant policy implications.

To conduct this study we identified 76 publications published between 2000 and 2012, 55 of which are empirical studies on education of former child soldiers. We searched scholarly databases<sup>2</sup> for academic articles using key words such as “child soldiers” combined with words such as “education,” “training,” “reintegration.” We also identified open source, practitioner publications using the official websites of international organizations and NGOs prominent in the field.<sup>3</sup>

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

- Aid agencies address education mainly as a vehicle to promote psychosocial well-being and the successful reintegration of former child soldiers.
- The effectiveness of education programs for former child soldiers is typically evaluated in terms of capacity building and reintegration, or by counting the number of children who participate in the programs. They tend not to focus on program content, quality, or learning outcomes.
- Comprehensive information often does not exist on the number of children who completed the program or dropped out, or on what happened to the children after they completed or dropped out of the program, for example, whether they continued with formal education or found employment.
- Program donors and implementers respond to education needs of former child soldiers both by supporting formal education systems and by developing alternative education programs. In order to support children in returning to the formal schooling system, they cooperate with government institutions, integrate alternative education models in school curriculum, provide in-kind support to schools, and/or assist children by paying their tuition fees, providing school materials, etc.
- In cases where formal education is not the best option, program implementers also provide alternative education programs. These programs are found to provide quality education in certain cases but they face challenges in terms of implementation, sustainability, and funding.
- It is difficult to comparatively assess the costs and benefits of providing support to the formal education versus developing alternative educational options because of a lack of data on costs, completion and drop out rates, and learning outcomes.
- Government cooperation in establishing official accreditation and certification helps students reenter education systems.
- Integrating former child soldiers with other war-affected children increases the likelihood of program success by reducing resentment and engaging communities.
- Participatory approaches to programming, which engage communities and children, enhance the relevance of educational interventions, encouraging former child soldiers to identify and help address their education needs, learning difficulties, and future aspirations. These approaches also reinforce community capacity so that the community can take over education activities, solve student problems, and help program graduates stay in the education system.
- Market surveys can ensure that vocational training develops skills that are relevant for the local and national market.
- Follow-up guidance and provision of toolkits for graduates of training program graduates can help them turn their skills into income generating professions.

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<sup>2</sup> Databases include ERIC, Education Full Text, JSTOR, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar.

<sup>3</sup> These organizations are UNICEF, USAID, EQUIP, World Bank, ILO, Save the Children, Coalition to Stop Use of Child Soldiers, International Rescue Committee, Human Rights Watch, Christian Children’s Fund. Bibliographies of relevant publications were used to find additional studies.

- The primary obstacles to the educational access and enrollment of former child soldiers include: economic difficulties, stigmatization and peer bullying, exclusion from a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process, their age, difficulty concentrating and learning, and distance to schools and learning centers.
- Weak follow-up monitoring and long-term tracking of program participants makes it impossible to assist former child soldiers in the longer-term or evaluate whether they continue their education or employment.
- Inadequate coordination causes duplication of efforts and wastes limited resources. It may also lead children to shop around for the biggest package of incentives, rather than participate in the most relevant one.
- Reintegration is often delayed by gaps in short-term funding, sometimes causing beneficiaries to lose trust in their program.

This paper is divided into four main sections after this one. The first presents a brief overview of the ongoing debates over the definitions of the term “child soldier.” The second examines the rationale behind educating former child soldiers. The third section summarizes and analyzes the existing evidence demonstrating the extent to which education programs implemented in the last decade have been successful, and how, as well as the ways in which they have been limited. The fourth section synthesizes the main findings and offers a conclusion.

## **I. THE PROBLEM OF CHILD SOLDIERING**

“Child soldiering” as a problem began to attract attention among international organizations with the release of the 1996 report by Graca Machel, which studied the impact of armed conflict on children (MacVeigh, Maguire, & Wedge, 2007). Since the mid-1990s, global advocates have lobbied successfully for changing international legal frameworks and policies to more forcefully prohibit the use of child soldiers (see Appendix I on international legal frameworks), and humanitarian actors have invested increasing resources in their demobilization and reintegration. However, these efforts have not been without controversy, and one of the more widely debated subjects has been how to define a child soldier. This subject of definition is important to consider when examining interventions to demobilize, reintegrate, and educate child soldiers. Indeed, the definition of a “child soldier” determines who will be targeted with what type of programs.

### **Who is a child soldier?**

The definition of who may be considered a child soldier remains disputed among donors and program implementers. Among the debated guidelines for who falls into that category is age. Most western countries and international legal instruments specify a person under the age of 18 as a child (Stark, Boothby, & Ager, 2009), but this definition is not universally accepted. In part, this is because notions of childhood and adulthood differ across cultures. For instance, according to some in Afghanistan, young people between 14 and 17 years old are recognized as adults who assume responsibility for their families (Chrobok, 2005). In parts of Africa, rites of passage and ceremonial acts such as circumcision determine the transition from childhood to adulthood (Boyden, 1997 cited in Stark *et al.*, 2009).

These variations in the perception of childhood play an important role in determining the parameters of programmatic interventions aimed at child soldiers. Some programs target former combatants who are under 18 at the time of program implementation, others work with those who were under 18 when they were recruited (MacVeigh, *et al.*, 2007), and still others (youth education programs) are designed for those between 12 and 25 years of age. Age is important since a lack of coordination

among organizations operating in the same country with different target groups can create competition and duplication of efforts.

A second debated guideline concerns the roles that children serve in armed groups. Children do not just carry guns. Rather, they also serve as porters, laborers, or spies (Stark *et al.*, 2009). Girls, moreover, are forced to become wives and sex slaves of adult soldiers (McKay & Mazurana, 2004). This diversity of roles, too, has important implications for programs designed to reintegrate and educate former child soldiers. Some programs target children who have carried a gun and recruit just those children who have turned in their weapons during disarmament. Others work with all children who have been associated with an armed group, regardless of their particular experiences. This more inclusive framework has prevailed in the last decade, and the inclusive phrase “children associated with armed forces”<sup>4</sup> has emerged (Stark *et al.*, 2009). This phrase takes into account the range of child soldier experiences and is defined by the Paris Principles (2007; 2.1) as:

any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.

Children who have faced different experiences and challenges may react in differing ways to interventions. Thus, these parameters for the roles that children serve in armed forces must be considered when implementing interventions designed to educate and reintegrate them into society.

## II. WHY EDUCATION?

Education programs are often part of the broader process of reintegrating child soldiers. According to the Paris Principles, “reintegration” is defined as “the process through which children transition into civil society,” assuming meaningful roles and civilian identities (Paris Principles, 2007, 2.8). Furthermore, their families and communities also play a critical role and should accept them “in a context of local and national reconciliation” (Paris Principles, 2007, 2.8). Reintegration may take place independent of a formal separation from armed forces, or it may be part of a broader and formal (adult) disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process. In this case, education and training activities also become a part of official DDR.

There is ample evidence indicating that including education in interventions aimed at reintegration—either as part of a formal DDR process or independently—is critical for success. Indeed, schooling can provide former child soldiers with the skills and competencies to facilitate their economic and social reintegration into society for several reasons. First, schooling can help put them back on more equal socioeconomic footing with their peers. In comparing former (male) combatants and non-combatants, Blattman and Annan (2008) found that lower levels of education is one of the most significant consequences of time spent as a child soldier—even more significant than severe psychological distress, which may be experienced only by a minority of former combatants. Because of time spent out of school, there tends to be a gap in the educational attainment of former child soldiers as compared to other youth, resulting in personal economic inequality and negatively

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<sup>4</sup> Our review shows that although programs in the last decade have commonly adopted this inclusive understanding of child soldier, the terms “child soldier” and “children associated with armed forces” are used interchangeably in both academic and practitioner publications. In this paper we use the term “child soldier” to mean the inclusive definition above.

impacting post-conflict development. Blattman and Annan, therefore, argue that “large and broad-based” investment in schooling is necessary for former child soldiers.

Second, educational opportunities may help ensure reintegration by giving former combatants a new social role and identity. Annan and her coauthors (2009) found that former combatants who expressed feelings of boredom and idleness due to a lack of educational and economic opportunities had more difficulty reintegrating. Similarly, Betancourt found that education and training can help former child soldiers develop goals and a sense of purpose in life (Betancourt, 2005 cited in Betancourt, *et al.*, 2008).

Third, schools and other education programs may prevent the stigmatization and social isolation of ex-child soldiers (Betancourt, *et al.*, 2008). Educational environments encourage the creation of peer groups, which can serve as a significant source of support. In northern Uganda, Annan and Blattman (2006) found that the support of friends helps former child soldiers to maintain moderate to high levels of functionality after they return to civilian life.

Fourth, education systems are an ideal place for integrating psychosocial support and referral networks, which can help former child soldiers deal with mental and emotional consequences of their experiences (Betancourt, *et al.*, 2008).

Last, education may provide an alternative to combat and act as an incentive to help deter former soldiers from reengaging in violence (Matsumoto, 2008). Relatedly, it is also important to note that education may help prevent child soldiering from occurring in the first place, since higher levels of education have been found to reduce the likelihood of voluntary recruitment (Beber & Blattman, 2011; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007).

To date, education and training programs have been included in interventions directed at former child soldiers mainly as a means to enhance their successful reintegration and psychosocial well-being (Annan, Brier, & Aryemo, 2009; Betancourt *et al.*, 2008; 2010; Kohrt *et al.*, 2010; Wessells, 2005; Williamson, 2006). Indeed, reintegration, psychosocial adjustment, and income generation are commonly cited as objectives of education programming for ex-combatants. As a result, neither academic nor practitioner analyses of reintegration interventions have assessed education independently, by examining, for example, educational content, quality, outcomes, or achievement. Rather, program outcomes focus on indicators that measure an ex-combatant’s adjustment to civilian life and success at holding a job. Yet, assessing education itself is important. Programs with inappropriate content or inadequate quality may be connected to underachievement and may not address the needs of the populations they are meant to serve, with negative implications for reintegration.

### **III. EDUCATION OF CHILD SOLDIERS: PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTION**

As discussed above, because education is typically part of a comprehensive and integrated strategy for working with child soldiers, these analyses of education typically occur as part of a larger study of wider reintegration programs. In these, education is just one dimension. Such assessments are confined to practitioner literature and usually based on qualitative data, often anecdotal and participant accounts, rather than quantitative or mixed methods empirical analysis. Quantitative data is typically only included when measuring enrollment, retention, and completion rates of students in the programs. Because of these methods of analysis, there is no systematic evidence on which characteristics of educational interventions produce higher levels of educational attainment under which circumstances. It is not known, for example, whether alternative education materials produce better learning outcomes than a government curriculum and under what conditions, the effects that

various approaches to learning (participatory, inclusive) have on achievement, or how these particular factors may impact reintegration. Instead, the existing literature primarily suggests which attributes of educational interventions directed at ex-combatants may encourage success in terms of widening their access to education and facilitating their resocialization, as well as the constraints and challenges that implementers face.

The following section first provides an overview of the types of education programs that exist for former child soldiers and the circumstances under which each type may be relevant. It next reviews the characteristics of educational interventions that have been identified to contribute to their success, and then shows how and why such interventions have been limited.

### **Types of Education Programs**

Humanitarian organizations implement a variety of educational interventions to foster social gains in response to the problem of child soldiering. In addition to basic learning requirements, these may include health, shelter, livelihood needs as well as conflict resolution and reconstruction (Menon & Arganese, 2007a). Interventions include support to formal education systems as well as provision of alternative education programs including basic skills training (literacy and numeracy), accelerated learning programs and catch-up education, vocational training, transit centers, peace education, and psychosocial care.<sup>5</sup> The type of response depends on three main factors: (1) the educational requirements of former child soldiers, (2) the approach of international organizations that fund and/or implement the program, and (3) the country and conflict context in which the program is taking place.

Former child soldiers have a wide range of educational needs depending on their experiences and country context. First, many have missed part or all of their education during child soldiering. Having returned, those who are still of school age need to catch up with their peers so that they can continue in formal schooling. To this end, the majority of educational interventions implemented are accelerated learning programs (ALPs) or catch-up education, which condense years of schooling into shorter periods to transition former child soldiers back into the formal education system (see Baxter & Bethke, 2009; Johannesen, 2005; Thomas, n.d.). Second, ex-combatants require specific skills and knowledge in order to reintegrate into society and be able to deal with potentially very different living conditions. Some former soldiers are too old to return to formal schooling and prefer to find employment rather than continuing formal education, or they may need to support their own children and families. In such cases, vocational or livelihood training is often the preferred intervention, particularly, as is discussed below, among those organizations that take an economic approach (see Hansen *et al.*, 2002, International Labour Office [ILO], 2007). Finally, many former child soldiers who have witnessed or experienced horrific events may need psychosocial support. Under these circumstances, psychosocial support structures and networks are either integrated into schools and formal curriculum or into alternative education programs (see United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2004; Peters & Laws, 2003).

International organizations' programming for child soldiers also differs according to whether they adopt a rights-based or economic approach. For example, UNICEF and Save the Children, two of the most prominent implementers of a rights-based approach, consult legal norms and conventions

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of alternative education programs, see Menon, G. & Arganese, A. (2007a). Issue Paper 2, Role of Education and the Demobilization of Child Soldiers - Aspects of an Appropriate Education Program for Child Soldiers. USAID – EQUIP 1; Sommers, M. (2006). Youth and Conflict. A brief review of available literature. USAID – EQUIP 3.

in developing their programs. Their main objective in providing education to former child soldiers is to socially reintegrate them into their families and societies and to bolster their psychosocial well-being. To these ends, their program activities include provision of basic education, alternative education, family livelihood development, and support to students for continuing formal education (Kemper, 2005). In contrast, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), take an economic approach to educating former child soldiers. They draw on macro and micro economic policies in developing their education, or rather training, programs, which aim to achieve socio-economic reintegration. Program activities, therefore, include vocational training, income-generating activities, basic education (particularly math and reading skills), and catch-up/accelerated education (Ibid) (see Appendix II for additional information on organizational approaches).

In developing education programs, it is also important to consider the country and conflict context, including the nature of the conflict and reasons why children take part in hostilities. For example, in some cases, children are abducted or recruited by physical force, as has occurred in areas like northern/eastern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Angola (Brett, n.d.). In other cases, they join armed forces and groups because of social and cultural pressure, economic incentives, desire for power and/or protection, political grievances, or because alternatives such as schooling or other employment are unavailable. This has occurred in areas like Sri Lanka, Philippines, Colombia, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and East Asian and the Pacific region countries (Brett, n.d.; Macro International Inc., 2007; Thomas, n.d.; UNICEF, 2002; War Child, 2006).

The nature of child soldiering and its causes have important implications for the reintegration needs of ex-combatants and, therefore, for program development. For example, child soldiers in Afghanistan, who tend not to be extremely alienated from their communities, do not require as great a degree of reintegration as those in many African countries. Almost all child soldiers in Afghanistan serve in a home guard and continue to live at home, remaining socially integrated into their villages and districts. In contrast, in Africa, many child soldiers are alienated and geographically separated from their communities. In addition, they are often forced to participate in violent acts directed toward their communities and experience horrific scenes and treatment (Macro International, Inc., 2007). Accordingly, the Demobilization and Reintegration (D&R) project in Afghanistan focuses primarily on “providing children with some psychosocial counseling and activities and an education and vocational head start to a better future” (Macro International, Inc., 2007, p. 22), while similar programs in African contexts incorporate activities aimed at social reintegration.

### **Characteristics of Successful Programs**

International organizations implementing educational interventions for former child soldiers tend to measure the success of their programs based on how well they provide access to education and the degree to which they cultivate socio-economic reintegration. Programs that successfully achieve these end goals tend to provide continuity, are inclusive, and are context appropriate. These characteristics of successful education programs are discussed in more detail in this section.

#### ***Ensuring Continuity***

International actors ensure the continuity of education for former child soldiers, in three main ways. First, they work to ensure balance between the formal and informal education systems. Second, they prioritize cooperation with the host government in order to achieve accreditation and integration of curricula. Third, they provide follow up support.

### (1) Balance between Formal and Alternative Programs:

Educational responses for former child soldiers include both support to formal education systems and provision of a selection of alternative education programs as discussed above. Because it is difficult to find comprehensive information on completion or drop out rates, learning outcomes, or what happens to children after graduation or drop out from alternative education programs, it is difficult to determine what type of programming is most effective in terms of these measures. Nevertheless, international organizations often prioritize transitioning former child soldiers back into formal education systems. Since alternative education programs funded by outsiders are only short term interventions, transition to formal education helps ensure continuity in their education.

One of the primary ways that organizations encourage increased enrollment of former child soldiers in the formal schooling system is by providing in-kind support to schools that forgo school fees for these groups. For example, UNICEF and other partners cooperated with the national DDR process in Sierra Leone to establish a Community Education Investment Programme (CEIP), which hinged on children being admitted to schools without paying fees. In turn, schools received in-kind support including teaching, learning and recreational materials. The program guaranteed one year of education for former child soldiers, which “relieved families of the initial financial burden for enrolment and proved an easy and cost-effective way to get children back in school. It also helped schools deal with their desperate need for supplies and provided educational assistance at a crucial time, when the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports was not able to institute a national programme” (UNICEF, 2004, p. 87). In 2003, more than 3,000 children were receiving support in the program.

Alternatively, organizations might directly pay school fees for former child soldiers, provide school materials, and/or arrange some scholarships. Save the Children argues that that this approach was crucial in keeping children in formal schooling in their program in Liberia since children dropped out when funding for school fees stopped (Peters & Laws, 2003).

However, formal schooling may not always be the best option for former child soldiers, particularly immediately after a conflict has ended and demobilization occurred. One reason for this is that school infrastructure may not be available. Or, even if educational resources are available, former child soldiers, especially older children, may not be able to attend school or may be unwilling to attend school with younger children. Moreover, their immediate psychosocial and reintegration requirements may be more pressing than basic educational needs. To this end, alternative education programs often function as complementary to the formal system and may serve former child soldiers particularly in the short term to allow them to complete at least the primary cycle of education before continuing in the formal system, to achieve basic literacy and numeracy skills, or to learn some type of trade or skill to obtain employment (Baxter & Bethke, 2009). Alternative education programs, therefore, include basic skills training (mainly literacy and numeracy), accelerated learning programs and catch-up education, vocational training, transit centers, peace education, and psychosocial care.

Yet, alternative education programs tend to be limited in several ways. First, and perhaps foremost, these programs may not be sustainable. One reason for this is that local communities may lack necessary capacities and expertise to take over program activities. In Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, and Guinea, education programs for former child soldiers could not hand over activities to local communities because of lack of capacity and knowledge. This problem, together with programs' lack of exit strategy, caused resentment among local communities and program participants (CSUCS, 2006; Hansen et al., 2002; Peters & Laws, 2003).

In addition, sustainability may also be an issue because trainers and educational material are expensive and funding may be insufficient (Baxter & Bethke, 2009). Sustainability was a problem, for

example, for the Office for Transition Initiative (OTI)'s Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace Program (YRTEP) in Sierra Leone, which proved "too complicated, expensive and difficult to replicate for locals" (Hansen et al., 2002 as cited in Kemper, 2005, p. 32). Similarly, although the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)'s accelerated learning program in the same country proved successful in terms of learning outcomes,<sup>6</sup> it relied on pedagogical supervision, control and in-service trainings, which made it relatively more expensive than programs that have less frequent follow-up and trainings (Johannesen, 2005). A Save the Children's evaluation of its programming in Afghanistan, Angola, Nepal, and southern Sudan<sup>7</sup> too "revealed the problems of sustainability of ALPs" in spite of findings showing their success in providing quality education<sup>8</sup> (Save the Children, 2011, p. 38). In Afghanistan, it was discovered that classes had not been operating for five months because the partner organization had withdrawn funding and teachers had not been paid.

It is important to note, however, that although program evaluations make reference to high levels of expenses, it is unclear whether the costs of alternative education programs exceed their benefits, particularly in comparison to formal schooling. It is particularly difficult to do a cost-benefit analysis because, as mentioned above, there is little data on costs, student completion and dropout rates, and what happens to students after graduation and drop out. One recent study by Farrell and Hartwell (2008) did find that in Bangladesh, Egypt, and Ghana, the per-pupil completion and per-pupil learning costs in alternative education programs were lower than those of formal primary school. This outcome was primarily due the fact that alternative education programs had higher completion rates. The completion rate for a four-year non-formal education program covering the standard five-year primary curriculum was 94 per cent in comparison to 67 per cent for public school students. Based on their findings, Farrell and Hartwell suggest that it is possible for alternative education programs "to reach underserved populations and regions cost-effectively and affordably" (2008, p.26). Nevertheless, this study was not carried out in conflict-affected countries and was not specific to the child soldier population, which faces a unique set of problems. It is, therefore, difficult to draw conclusions about whether alternative education programs are more cost-effective than the formal system for ex-combatants, or whether, for example, it would be less costly for "older children simply to follow a normal course of primary education but in separate classes with only older children in attendance" than to enroll them in alternative programs (Baxter & Bethke, 2009, p. 49).

Alternative education programs face several other limitations as well. In particular, the learning achievements of participants in these programs may not be formally recognized at the national level. In addition, it may be problematic and may generate resentment if these alternative programs have different education standards than the formal system. In Liberia, for example, some graduates of transit centers pointed to their dissatisfaction with the schools in their community as the main reason for drop-out (Peters & Laws, 2003). The authors, therefore, emphasize that it is important to keep stays in those centers as short as possible to allow for children's prompt return to formal schooling and communities. The quality and content of alternative education programs may also be an issue.

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<sup>6</sup> In 2004, out of 2,286 primary school students who enrolled for the National Primary School Exam (NPSE) in Kono district, 91 per cent passed the exam. Out of 570 CREPS (Complementary Rapid Education for Primary Schools) students who enrolled for the exam, 90 per cent passed. (Johannesen, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> These programs did not specifically identify former child soldiers as the target group. Programs were for "a range of vulnerable groups: uneducated youth, children in remote communities, children from ethnic minorities in contexts where the barriers to their education in mainstream schools were too great to be overcome in the short term" (p. v)

<sup>8</sup> In Angola, a 2010 evaluation showed that the reading and mathematics scores of students in ALP classes were significantly higher than those of regular school students in the equivalent grade.

Charlick (2005) finds that these programs often do not focus on *how* students learn most effectively. In addition, teachers in alternative education programs may have no previous training or experience, and pre-service and in-service teacher trainings can be very expensive (Baxter & Bethke, 2009, Macro International, Inc., 2007; Johannesen, 2005). Moreover, in preparing children for national examinations, teachers may not pay enough attention to psychosocial and health issues, despite the fact that these issues are critical in accelerated program curricula (Mansaray & Associates, 2006 cited in Baxter & Bethke, 2009).

In part because of these difficulties, humanitarian organizations typically treat these alternative education programs as complementary measures, meant to supplement and facilitate the transition to the formal education system. Indeed, the World Bank argues that the issue is not whether the formal or informal system is better or more cost-effective. Rather, there is a need for a variety of education programs to serve the various requirements and experiences of learners (World Bank, 2005 cited in Baxter & Bethke, 2009). For example, children and youth may have psychosocial needs that may be difficult to meet in the formal education system (Baxter & Bethke, 2009). Accordingly, alternative education programs are an important option despite the challenges mentioned above. Nevertheless, ensuring continuity and coordination between the formal and alternative systems is key to program success and continued enrollment, and one way that international organizations do so is by prioritizing cooperation with the State government.

#### (2) Cooperation with the Government:

International aid agencies recognize that, despite the usually weak state in countries affected by conflict, cooperating with the government in promoting educational programs is essential (Burde *et al.*, 2011). The studies reviewed for this paper rarely connect cooperation with the government with program success. Yet those agencies that work with the government to develop and implement education programs appear more successful, as measured by the number of children who return to formal schooling. In addition, researchers like Baxter and Bethke (2009) suggest that cooperation with the government is essential for improving the quality of education and that it may benefit the education system overall. Importantly, cooperation may also help strengthen the national education institutions.

Cooperation with the national government is considered critical to ensure that the curricula are complementary and that the programs are accredited. In terms of curricula, one way that international actors facilitate the transition for former child soldiers into the formal education system and ensure continuity and continued enrollment is by incorporating the State curriculum into informal education programs. In Afghanistan, for example, cooperation played a key role in allowing project graduates to gain access into the formal education system (Macro International Inc., 2007). The program used the Ministry of Education's (MOE) official nine-month literacy curriculum and textbooks, and after testing and certifying, many graduates of the demobilization and reintegration project entered the formal school system. Likewise, Save the Children UK offered catch-up education in transit centers for former child soldiers in Liberia. The program consisted of a compressed government curriculum which enabled ex-child soldiers and other war-affected children who had missed years of education to make a smooth transition back into formal schooling (Peters & Laws, 2003). In addition, Save the Children cooperated with the Liberian MOE to promote the catch-up curriculum beyond the initial transit centers. As a result, about 72 per cent were able to continue their education after they left the center. In contrast, only half of the "self-demobilized" children were able to go back to formal school. An evaluation of the program showed that the relationship with the Liberian MOE was instrumental (Peters & Laws, 2003).

Importantly, comprehensive information on what happens to program participants after graduation is limited. Therefore, it is not entirely clear what happens to these children when they continue with

formal schooling; for example, how highly they achieve. However, there are some promising indications. For example, an NRC accelerated education program in Sierra Leone ensured that content and teaching were in harmony with regular schools. A study found that initial graduates from the program who took the national exam to continue in education at the secondary level performed well and that drop-out was very low (Johannesen, 2005).

In addition, integrating subjects or activities into formal education systems may also help with retention. These may include life skills subjects such as peace, citizenship, and human rights education, as well as psychosocial intervention structures such as recreation, sports, and cultural activities (Baxter & Bethke, 2009). For example, in Aceh province of Indonesia, a peace education program was introduced into public and private schools to promote non-violence and peaceful conflict resolution among children. The project was implemented in almost one hundred schools over two years, with the participation of more than 22,000 students. A program assessment showed that teachers, school administrators and students using the program were convinced of the value of peace education in the school curriculum and wanted to continue the program (UNICEF, 2004).

### (3) Follow-Up Support:

Follow-up support to program graduates is another program attribute that helps ensure continued program success, particularly in terms of vocational training. One way that this support occurs is through the provision of toolkits that give graduates the materials necessary to start working. For example, graduates of one program in Afghanistan received toolkits upon completion of the program and many of them opened their own shops (Macro International, Inc., 2007). Start-up kits also enabled graduates of a vocational training program in Sierra Leone to begin earning income following program completion (Williamson, 2005). An assessment of the program showed that 70 percent of participants were able to earn income (Williamson, 2005). In contrast, in other cases where program participants did not receive start-up kits at the end of their skills training, they were unable to use their new skills to increase their household income (Delap, 2004).

Follow up support may also come in the form of post-program counseling or other support. Participants of the program in Sierra Leone received follow up support and counseling on using their skills and tools. For five agencies in Liberia, linking graduates with existing companies and business, in addition to providing them with 'starter packages' of toolkits, were considered key ingredients for the success of the programs (Peters & Laws, 2003).

Finally, some practitioners argue that provision of micro-credit/funding can help former child soldiers overcome resource challenges and turn their acquired skills into a profession (Chrobok, 2005; Delap, 2004; Hansen *et al.*, 2002; Peters & Laws, 2003), although the existing evidence to support this assumption is weak. It is also important to recognize that a lack of business knowledge and skills among young people can lead to ineffective use of the funding. For example, in Colombia a micro-enterprise program administered after vocational training failed because the graduates spent the funding too quickly rather than investing it in their own work (Thomas, n.d.). Similarly, providing start-up funds without a guiding and monitoring plan to former child soldiers who did not have expertise in microfinance proved unsuccessful in Liberia (Thiongane, 2007).

### Inclusive Programming

Successful educational interventions also take an inclusive approach to schooling by integrating former child soldiers with other war-affected children in the same learning environments and by encouraging the participation of children and local communities in the educational process.

### (1) Integrated Education:

Integrated education programs—ones combining former combatants who have participated in a formal DDR process, former combatants who have not participated in a formal DDR process, noncombatants and other war-affected children—are increasingly prevalent and believed to play a role in changing community attitudes toward child soldiers and encouraging reintegration. Previously, reintegration activities, including education and training, were limited to those ex-combatants who participate in the disarmament and demobilization process. However, recent studies show that limiting program participants in this way may actually increase the stigmatization and marginalization of former child soldiers from their communities. In addition, targeting just ex-combatants who have participated in the DDR process may actually exclude some of the most vulnerable. These may include former child soldiers who do not have access to the DDR process. Indeed, some children may be ineligible (for example, girls, since they usually do not have a gun to turn in), may be given false information, or may be afraid of stigmatization (MacVeigh *et al.*, 2007; Peters & Laws, 2003). The most vulnerable may also include those who are not associated with armed forces or groups. For example, research in Cote d'Ivoire, Nepal, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda shows that other groups of children may be as vulnerable, or even more vulnerable, than former child soldiers (MacVeigh *et al.*, 2007). Researchers working in northern Uganda argue persuasively that “abduction status is a crude and unreliable predictor of need; large numbers non-abducted youth exhibit serious educational, economic, social and health challenges, while significant numbers of abductees perform quite well relative to their peers” (Annan *et al.*, 2007; p. 1). Accordingly, practitioners and researchers increasingly agree that it is more effective to integrate all former child soldiers with other war-affected children, and that doing so avoids further stigmatization and resentment and achieves broader access to education for all (Annan *et al.*, 2007; Amone-P'Olak, 2007; Delap, 2004; Hansen, *et al.*, 2002; Macro International Inc., 2007; MacVeigh, *et al.*, 2007; Peters & Laws, 2003; UNICEF, 2004).

Among the specific advantages of providing integrated and inclusive education is the finding that extending interventions to other war-affected children facilitates community acceptance of these programs and their cooperation with them. In Liberia, for example, one community was unhappy with the idea of hosting a transit center for former child soldiers (Peters & Laws, 2003). Access to free education for their children, however, changed their opinions about the center.

Additionally, inclusive programs help prevent resentment among those who may otherwise be excluded, as well as ensure that other war-affected children have access to necessary services and support. Research on a Save the Children program in Sierra Leone shows that former child soldiers who could not access the program because they did not go through the DDR process were bitter and resentful of program beneficiaries (Delap, 2004). Similarly, participant accounts from a program in eastern Uganda show that working with former child soldiers separate from other war-affected children who have similar social and economic difficulties may be an obstacle to reintegration (Chrobok & Akutu, 2008). Conversely, the “catch-up education” offered in the transit centers in Liberia ended up being effective in uniting ex-child soldiers and other war-affected children. In interviews, half of former child soldiers noted that the catch-up education helped them build relationships with other children in the community (Peters & Laws, 2003).

However, it is also important to point out that inclusive programs are not a panacea for marginalization and stigmatization of ex-combatants. A number of studies show that former child soldiers can be marginalized even within an integrated educational community. In Colombia, for example, researchers found that former soldiers experienced stigmatization by peers and teachers and that they were subjected to rejection by schoolmates (Thomas, n.d.). Likewise, interviews with 400 children in Nepal demonstrated that reintegration in schools was difficult for ex-child soldiers. Some children were picked on by peers and teachers, and many were “marginalized and ostracized”

in the school community (Shakya, 2011, p. 563). Due to this stigmatization and peer bullying, former child soldiers in eastern Uganda were more likely to drop out of school (Chrobok & Akutu, 2008). Because of these continued risks, Save the Children suggests it is important to employ well-trained staff to work with the children and to maintain a continuous dialogue with program participants (Verhey, 2003). If these procedures are followed, Save the Children argues that tensions eventually subside and solidarity may slowly emerge.

### (2) A Participatory Approach:

Both practitioner literature and academic publications widely recognize the importance of cooperating and negotiating with program participants and the local community in implementing interventions. Research shows that including children in planning, implementation, and evaluation of reintegration activities, particularly schooling and vocational training, helps develop programs tailored to address their needs. Community participation, on the other hand, contributes to capacity development, and helps ensure program sustainability.

In terms of engaging children, emerging research shows that children affected by conflict are more resilient than previously assumed (Blattman & Annan, 2009; Boothby *et al.*, 2006). Successful programs build on this resilience and further encourage its development, for example, by having participants develop and implement their own activities (Matsumoto, 2008; Sommers, 2006; UNICEF, 2004). In Liberia, Save the Children had ex-child soldiers in transit centers contribute to decision-making on education, training, and recreational activities (Peters & Laws, 2003). Participants' behavior changed during their time in the centers; for example, they stopped fighting and smoking. Similarly, UNICEF (2004) focuses on the importance of including children in schooling and vocational training planning and activities so that the program can address their concerns.

Second, cooperating with local communities on program implementation can strengthen community capacity and ensure sustainability by allowing communities to assume responsibility from international organizations. Engaging the community may also mean that more support is given to program participants to remain in the education system. An evaluation of a Save the Children program in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) showed that community child protection networks—composed of, for example, children, local authorities, religious leaders, women's associations—empowered community members to successfully contribute to the program (Verhey, 2003, p. 20). Participants launched protection activities for the children and resolved barriers to access, such as school fees. In addition, the networks were useful in providing monitoring and follow-up. However, the assessment also points out that they remained dependent on Save the Children for expertise and financial support and that child participation was weak. They also proved to be more expensive than traditional program approaches (Verhey, 2003).

Likewise, local communal participation and leadership was an important dimension in the smooth operation and success of UNICEF's Demobilization and Reintegration Project (D&R) in Afghanistan (Macro International Inc., 2007).<sup>9</sup> Local *shuras* (committees including religious leaders and other community-level leaders) throughout the country provided support for children's education through community-based leadership and local self-governance. The project employed local teachers and social workers, which eased security concerns and helped with broader educational issues such as promoting girls' access to education. One drawback was that these individuals did not always have the appropriate level of education or necessary skills. In addition, since the quality of instruction and services were not assessed, the role of local teachers and learning outcomes were not clear.

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<sup>9</sup> The project's full name is: Demobilization of Child Soldiers and Socio-Economic Reintegration of War-Affected Young People in Afghanistan, but it is referred to as the D&R project in the literature, so we abbreviate it that way here.

In sum, a participatory approach provides important leadership opportunities to young people and likely improves programming effectiveness by consulting program participants about their education needs, learning difficulties, and future aspirations. Although the impact of this approach on learning outcomes is not discussed in the literature, the fact that program content is more likely to be relevant to children's day-to-day lives may help sustain their participation in the programs (Save the Children, 2005). This approach also reinforces community capacity, allowing the community to assume responsibility for education activities, to address student difficulties, and to help program graduates stay in the education system.

### Context

Finally, successful educational interventions for former child soldiers are context-specific, although developing and implementing programs that meet the age and educational requirements of all former child soldiers can prove very difficult. For example, an accelerated learning program (ALP) may help children complete a number of years of education in shorter time in order catch up with their peers and take national exams. However, the compressed nature of the curriculum, with limited time for review, may be less appropriate or too challenging for younger children and slow learners. In Kono district of Sierra Leone, the Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) Complementary Rapid Education for Primary Schools (CREPS) condensed a six-year primary education into three years to enable students to take the national exam and continue in secondary schools. But out of 8,453 students who were enrolled in the program, 4,701 could not take the exam. Part of the reason for this was that children were too young: 27% of this group of students had entered the program too early. They were 12 years old and below—under the age range targeted by the program (Johannesen, 2005). Baxter & Bethke, therefore, suggest that younger children should be enrolled in formal schools rather than in accelerated programs (2009).

International organizations have developed a few mechanisms for developing programming that is context-relevant. First, incorporating child and community participation, as discussed above, is one way to ensure that educational interventions meet the individual and community needs. Second, vocational programs may implement a market survey to match training with labor market needs.

### (1) Market Survey

Although education is typically seen as a means for generating increased income, vocational or apprenticeship training, more specifically, is included as an integral part of reintegration programs for similar reasons. Yet a number of researchers criticize vocational training activities for being irrelevant for participants, for not taking local needs sufficiently into account, and for not necessarily increasing income generation opportunities (Kemper, 2005; Rahim & Holland, 2006; MacVeigh *et al.*, 2007; Verhey, 2001). For example, Sommers (2003) criticizes economic programs for war-affected youth in general since they are expensive, reach a small percentage, and do not prepare participants for sustainable careers.

To address these challenges, international organizations increasingly conduct market surveys as a way to improve the outcomes of vocational training. These surveys help match vocational skills to the region in which they will be used and ensure that they are context appropriate. For example, in Afghanistan, program managers relied on a national labor market survey and on the recommendations of the local *shuras* (Macro International, Inc., 2007). Because approximately 85 percent of the Afghan population depends on agriculture and many program participants come from farming families, program activities ended up focusing on agricultural production. In addition, other program activities included tailoring since girls were able to do this work in their homes (Chrobok, 2005). According to a post-project evaluation, many children successfully found employment upon program completion. However, since they were not tracked, the number of graduates who continue

to remain unemployed is unknown (Macro International, Inc., 2007). Nevertheless, conducting a market survey appears important for creating vocational training content so that children will acquire relevant skills that are in demand by the local and national market.

### **Challenges faced by Education Programs**

Programs are limited in their success in terms of learner difficulties, sustainability, coordination, and funding. These challenges are reviewed in this section.

#### Barriers to Enrollment, Access, and Achievement

Studies carried out in the past decade show the difficulties that former child soldiers experience in gaining access to education are compounded by the social and economic realities of countries that have long been affected by insecurity and conflict. In responding to the needs of ex-combatants, humanitarian organizations therefore, face the dual challenges of first, a damaged education system (e.g. destroyed infrastructure, lack of materials and teachers, insufficient finances), and second, the difficulty that child soldiers may have as they become learners again and try to adapt to the cognitive and social requirements of education environments (Menon & Arganese, 2007b). These challenges create barriers to ex-combatants' enrollment and access to education, as well as their ability to learn.

(1) Enrollment: Among these challenges are the pressing economic needs that returning child soldiers face. Many of them come from impoverished families that are unable to support them after they return. They may also face the absence of parents and elder siblings. Organizations implementing educational interventions, therefore, must contend with the competing demands generated by the need for former child soldiers to either contribute to the household income or to assume full responsibility for their families. In Burundi, for example, it was found that the percentage of former child soldiers who were heads of households was considerably higher than for civilian children (Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program [MDRP], 2007). Similarly, of all the boys who had demobilized in northern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 56 per cent had at least one child that they needed to support (War Child, 2006). For these children, it is impossible to participate in special education programs or attend regular schools during formal hours (Chrobok & Akutu, 2008; Menon & Arganese, 2007b; Shakya, 2011; Verhey, 2001).

Aid organizations have developed and suggested several ways for dealing with these challenges. For instance, they invest more resources in economic and livelihood support than social and educational programs in order to better equip former child soldiers for running a household (MDRP, 2007). Or, to increase enrollment in education, some observers suggest providing financial support such as bursary programs or paying school fees to deal with these obstacles (Annan *et al.*, 2007). In doing so, however, organizations need to work in cooperation. Some research has shown that migration between programs is common if there are policy discrepancies in providing financial benefits (MacVeigh *et al.*, 2007; Thiongane, 2007). Finally, other organizations address the problem of economic needs by scheduling education programs for child soldiers in such a way as to allow them work and study at the same time (Verhey, 2001).

A second economic challenge to enrollment is that school fees and the cost of uniforms and school materials place significant economic burdens on former child soldiers and serve as barriers to education (Betancourt, *et al.*, 2008; Chrobok & Akutu, 2008; Delap, 2004). In Burundi, 70 percent of more than 280 former child soldiers interviewed were not enrolled in school, and among them, 43 percent reported that "schooling was too expensive or they lacked the means to enrol" (MDRP, 2007, p. 3). In Liberia, Save the Children similarly showed that children continued their education for only two years after completing their program in transit centers. The assessment noted that school fees were the main obstacle to continuity for almost 60 percent of students and that the need to

purchase a uniform barred almost 20 percent of students (Peters and Laws, 2003). Save the Children addressed this problem by paying school fees for some children. However, some dropped out of formal education when the organization stopped paying.

Third, some former child soldiers may be resistant to continuing with education because of beliefs about age-appropriate behavior—in other words, they feel too old to go back to school. In Nepal, for example, children did not return to school because they were old for the grades assigned to them and they felt like “misfits” among younger children (Shakya, 2011, p.563). In Liberia, the inclusion of youths into an education system designed for younger children resulted in behavioral problems and led to a higher drop-out rate among former child soldiers (Peters & Laws, 2003). Ex-child soldiers’ lack of interest in studying because of their age and their associated feelings of shame was also one reason why only 12 percent of participants in a Christian Children’s Fund special program in Angola continued on with their formal education afterwards (Christian Children’s Fund, 1998). A study in northern Uganda similarly quantitatively demonstrates that the return to school by former child soldiers decreases as their age increases (Annan *et al.*, 2010).

(2) Access: Former child soldiers also experience barriers to accessing education. As mentioned above, former child soldiers who do not complete a DDR program commonly do not continue their education, either because they are ineligible because they have no arms to turn in, because they do not have enough information, or because they are afraid of stigmatization (MacVeigh *et al.*, 2007; Peters & Laws, 2003). These difficulties tend to affect girls more than boys, since DDR activities are usually aimed at boys and men, who have carried arms. In contrast, female soldiers, who have often served as sex slaves and service providers, have no arms to turn and, therefore, are unable to participate (MacKay & Mazurana, 2004; UNICEF, 2004). As discussed above, aid agencies may adopt inclusive approaches to address this drawback.

Former child soldiers report that the location of schools and special education programs is a barrier to access. For example, children in remote communities in Sierra Leone complained that they had to travel long distances to attend schools (Delap, 2004). In Angola, training mainly took place in the provincial capitals, thereby excluding children who lived in the municipalities. Therefore, distance was one of the reasons that only 4.5 percent of children persisted in vocational courses (Christian Children’s Fund, 1998). Some organizations have attempted to address this problem by establishing educational and training centers closer to the populations they are meant to serve. For example, recognizing that former child soldiers were concentrated in rural areas in Afghanistan, UNICEF and cooperating NGOs established project sites across districts, primarily in rural areas. As a result, former child soldiers did not need to travel to urban training centers. This initiative was not entirely successful because security, logistical, and budgetary limitations prevented the program from reaching children in some rural areas (Macro International Inc., 2007). Nevertheless, since community-based schools have met with success in Afghanistan (Burde & Linden, 2011), it may be worth modifying the model to support programs for former child soldiers.

(3) Learning Difficulties: Finally, former child soldiers also experience learning difficulties. In particular, the experiences that child soldiers have while associated with armed groups may make it difficult for returnees to readjust to the requirements of a learning environment. Although confounding factors make it difficult to evaluate which obstacle is most prominent, many former child soldiers cite difficulty with concentration as negatively impacting their ability to learn. This was the case for former child soldiers in eastern Uganda and Nepal, as well as for children in transit centers in Liberia (Chrobok & Akutu, 2008; Peters & Laws, 2003; Shakya, 2011). In response, program staff in the centers in Liberia have emphasized the importance of a flexible curriculum, which allows participants to express their preferences, learn at their own pace, and explore different educational topics.

### Longer-term Tracking and Follow-up

As mentioned above longer-term tracking and follow-up with program participants are crucial for continued program success and to prevent re-recruitment. These steps may include tracking program graduates to see how they fare in the longer term, providing follow-up support activities, and ensuring local community and government structures have the capacity to maintain support (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers [CSUCS], 2006). Although practitioners embrace these steps as critical ingredients for long-term success, the majority of programs in the last decade have faced challenges and lapses in maintaining these standards.

In particular, it has been difficult to evaluate the success of programs over the long term and to access what type of programs tend to contribute to longer term success, primarily because long-term tracking of graduates is rare. For example, when UNICEF concluded its D&R program in Afghanistan in December 2007, there was no formal system to monitor and track graduates. The project was judged as immediately successful in terms of moving children into formal education and the job market, as well as in terms of contributing to local and national capacity development (Macro International Inc., 2007). However, the absence of long-term tracking after the end of the program made it impossible to determine whether the graduates of the program sustained their participation in the formal school system or maintained their employment (Ibid). Consequently, it was not possible to see how the program helped children in the longer term. This is a common shortcoming among the majority of programs because longer-term tracking is usually not a component of education programs.

Similarly, Save the Children has encountered difficulties in following children for different reasons in different locations. At the end of a transit center program, the agency sent children home with serious problems and with the expectation that their families would keep them without economic assistance or other form of support from outside. In that case, they did not plan for or implement any follow up monitoring (Peters & Laws, 2003). In Sri Lanka and the DRC, displacement and insecurity impeded Save the Children's ability to do follow-up monitoring of program participants (MacVeigh, *et al.*, 2007). In eastern Uganda, the insufficient numbers of district authorities and local child protection agencies and the lack of resources and services in the region inhibited long term follow-up (Chrobok & Akutu, 2008).

### Challenges to Sustainability

Ensuring sustainability also remains a significant challenge to successful educational interventions because of lack of resources, insufficient planning, and limited local capacity and expertise. For instance, several studies of DDR programs in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Uganda show that lack of appropriate program investment limited sustainability of the assistance (CSUCS, 2006). In Liberia, the Christian Children's Fund identified the failure to implement an effective and sustainable exit strategy as a major limitation of the program (Thiongane, 2007). Likewise, when Save the Children closed its transit centers in Liberia, the program largely ended since few schools were handed over to the local communities because they lacked the necessary expertise and capacity (Peters & Laws, 2003).

### Coordination and Cooperation

As with most aid programs, agencies implementing programs for former child soldiers widely recognize the importance of coordination and cooperation among donors and practitioners. Early coordination helps respond to unforeseen events, while a lack of coordination or conflicting

approaches waste resources and result in frustration and mistakes (MacVeigh, *et al.*, 2007). These challenges negatively affect education programs in several ways. First, differences in material assistance packages may disrupt program implementation and cause resentment among participants. In Liberia, some agencies offered training allowances, others offered daily meals, and some did not offer direct incentives at all. As noted above, in such cases, children migrated among programs, seeking the one that offered the most incentives even though it may not have matched the student's needs (MacVeigh, *et al.*, 2007; Thiongane, 2007).

Second, some programs for child soldiers face challenges from the parallel programs for adults. For example, the demobilization and reintegration project (D&R) in Afghanistan identified every returnee under the age 18 as a child, despite the fact that some Afghans consider underage combatants (aged 14-17) to be adults with the same needs as adult combatants. The adult program opposed the approach of the D&R project to former child soldiers, and the two programs ran completely detached from one another (Chrobok, 2005; Macro International Inc., 2007). This led to duplication of efforts as well as resentment among the younger participants since the adult program offered better incentives, including micro-credit schemes (Chrobok, 2005).

Despite the recognition of its importance, coordination remains a challenge for several reasons. One is the absence of a platform for information sharing between diverse actors. In Colombia, there was no forum for sharing program experiences and assessments, and some of the organizations, including universities and NGOs, developed and implemented programs in isolation (Thomas, n.d.). In the DRC, Save the Children encountered difficulties when the number of actors in the program increased, leading to insufficient communication, competition, and opportunism among local organizations (Verhey, 2003). Finally, lack of agreement between diverse actors might block coordination, as experienced in Afghanistan between the UN agencies and humanitarian organizations working for reintegration of ex-combatants (Chrobok, 2005).

### Funding Challenges

Underfunding of education in conflict-affected countries is a problem in general, even though disbursement of funds among program activities and program implementers is critical for success of programs (Brannelly *et al.*, 2009; Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Levin & Dollar, 2005; Save the Children, 2009; UNESCO, 2011). Projects targeting former child soldiers are, therefore, often impeded by inadequate funding and insufficient resources (financial, material, and human).

There are a few main reasons for this consistent underfunding. First, humanitarian assistance is characterized by short-term funding to address immediate needs. Although many aid workers recommend focusing on longer-term plans and funds for education for children affected by conflict (Burde *et al.*, 2011), program evaluations show that short-term funding continues to impede work with former child soldiers. These funding constraints have directly impacted educational programs for ex-combatants. For example, the original budgets for Afghanistan's demobilization and reintegration project in Afghanistan, did not cover all the implementing agencies' expenses (Macro International Inc., 2007). For the vocational training program, a fixed amount of funding for each participant covered the training and toolkit. However, since some trades cost more than others, the funding did not cover the expenses for all those enrolled in the class. In such cases, especially when there are delays in dispersing funds, the smaller, national NGOs suffer most since they do not have access to alternate sources of funding.

Furthermore, funding constraints are especially acute between the demobilization and reintegration program "phases." In West Africa, for example, funding gaps between program phases undermined the success of the whole process (CSUCS, 2006). In Sierra Leone and Liberia, there was a long gap

between the end of demobilization and the beginning of reintegration when children were left on their own and vulnerable to re-recruitment. Similarly, experiences from Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire demonstrated how the failure to reintegrate ex-child soldiers in one conflict could actually inflame another. In 2004, Save the Children found that 25 per cent of demobilized children in Sierra Leone were re-recruited by armed groups in Liberia (War Child, 2006). In response, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSUCS) suggests establishing flexible funding mechanisms to cover the period between demobilization and reintegration to "ensure the training of personnel, establish necessary infrastructures and inform children about programs" (2006, p. 26, see also Save the Children, 2005b; MacVeigh *et al.*, 2007).

## CONCLUSION

Education programs for former child soldiers attract attention from implementers because of the role these programs can play in enhancing their psychosocial well-being and successful reintegration. However, despite the fact that evidence shows that the experience of being associated with armed groups severely affects the education of child soldiers, there has been little evaluation of how effectively educational interventions are implemented in terms of content, quality, and learning outcomes. This lack of information is likely due to the fact that aid agencies and stakeholders have historically framed education as a vehicle for income generation activities, broader reintegration, conflict resolution, and reconstruction, rather than an important end in and of itself.

Consequently, the available evidence does not help us determine the best options for responding to the educational needs of former child soldiers, such as the comparative advantages of different programs for which categories of children and under what conditions. Nevertheless, a review of the literature provides some guidance on the characteristics of interventions most likely to increase the education access and enrollment of former child soldiers and contribute to their reintegration. These programs ensure continuity, they are integrative and inclusive, and they are context-specific. This review has identified several key ways for achieving these characteristics.

First, international actors should invest resources and efforts in the existing formal education system, provided that the system provides good quality, nondiscriminatory education. Some evaluations have shown that it is best for younger children to continue their education in the formal schools. In addition, the psychosocial needs of these children can be addressed in the formal system through support structures and networks, and life skills and psychosocial activities can be integrated into formal curriculum. However, older children may not be able or willing to attend school in the same classes as younger children. In such case, appropriate alternative education programs may be a better option. It is important to consider the quality of such interventions. Some evidence shows that alternative education programs are effective in providing quality education, yet they may also face challenges in terms of implementation, quality, sustainability, and funding.

Second, this review shows that cooperating with government institutions to develop and implement programs is critical for ensuring appropriateness, sustainability, and capacity-building. For example, using government curriculum, or integrating it in program curriculum, prepares students to pass national examinations. Government accreditation and certification of programs also make it easier to transition students back into formal schools. Moreover, program activities and resources (teachers, materials, etc.) may later be transferred to the formal education system if government is involved in the process from the beginning.

Third, education programs that integrate former child soldiers with other war-affected children may facilitate successful reintegration. However, program implementers need to ensure that teachers and staff are well trained to handle problems, such as bullying and stigmatization.

Fourth, incorporating students' and local communities' input in program development and implementation is key. Evidence shows that doing so ensures that programs are context-relevant, sustainable, and continuous and that they contribute to capacity building. Participation also helps ensure that program activities are relevant to former child soldiers.

Finally, it is critical to plan vocational training options in ways that enable program participants to turn their acquired skills into an occupation. Many former child soldiers have children or families that they have to support. For these individuals, vocational training that will lead to employment may be preferable to education. Research shows that market analysis is critical in planning vocational program content so that participants are trained in skills demanded by the local market. Moreover, programs should provide material support and guidance in the aftermath of the programs to help graduates enter the job market.

## APPENDIX – I

### International Norms and Standards on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration<sup>10</sup>

#### *Machel Report 1996*

A landmark study that initiated a global movement, the Graça Machel report of 1996 critically analyzed particular countries that use children in armed conflict and effectively advocated for a greater call to cater to the needs of those vulnerable and neglected children. The report shed light to issues such as demobilizing children illegally recruited by armed forces and their reintegration into society. Marking the 10th anniversary of its publication, a strategic review of the Machel report (informally referred to as the 'Machel Plus 10') was released in October 2007 to address similar issues for the next 10 years.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Cape Town Principles and Best Practices 1997*

Developed in 1997 by child protection agencies based on their experiences in Africa, the Cape Town Principles and Best Practices consists of three parts: prevention of recruitment, demobilization of child soldiers, and reintegration into community life. A significant achievement of the document lies in its expansion of the definition of "child soldiers" to include cooks, messengers, and girls recruited for sexual purposes who do not necessarily carry arms. At the same time, the document lacks both legal backing and enforcement or accountability mechanisms. Thus, the nature of it allows the standards to be quite high, yet poses the challenge of achieving political buy-in by African governments. Discussions were held to update the Cape Town Principles: the result was the Paris Principles (see below).<sup>12</sup>

#### *Optional Protocol 2000*

According to the recent global progress report produced by UNICEF, a total of 117 countries have ratified the "Optional Protocol to CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict" to date, which is a tremendous improvement from the 13 countries in January 2002.<sup>13</sup> The ratification of the Optional Protocol means widespread support to prevent hostilities against children; however, there are certain points in the Articles 1, 2, and 3 that raise issues regarding the voluntary nature of recruitment and the differences between state parties and armed forces.

#### *UN Security Council Resolution 1612*

A series of UN Security Council Resolutions on children and armed conflict from 1999 to 2005<sup>14</sup> resulted in the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism on child rights violations during armed conflict. The most recent of the series, Resolution 1612, was adopted unanimously by the United Nations Security Council on 26 July 2005. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, along with UNICEF and other national and international partners, began implementing in 2006 the monitoring and reporting mechanism in

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<sup>10</sup> Appendix reproduced from Hamakawa, T. & Randall, K. (2008). Measuring the unmeasurable: Community reintegration of former child soldiers in Cote d'Ivoire / submitted to Save the Children UK and Harvard Kennedy School. More recent developments include SC Resolution 1998 that extends the triggers for the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism to include attacks on schools and hospitals.

<sup>11</sup> Coomaraswamy, Radhika et al. *Machel Study 10-year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World* (UNICEF 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Search for Common Ground, *Updating the Cape Town Principles of 1997: Meeting Notes - October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2005*, (Search for Common Ground 2005).

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF, *Progress for Children: A World Fit for Children, Statistical Review*, (UNICEF 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Referring to UN Security Council Resolutions 1261 [1999], 1314 [2000], 1379 [2001], 1460 [2003], 1539 [2004], and 1612 [2005].

seven pilot countries: Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Sudan.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Integrated DDR Standards 2006*

Although the DPKO and European Union attempted to provide standards in DDR practices as described above, the UN had no “clear and usable policies and guidelines to facilitate coordination and cooperation among UN agencies, departments and Programs”.<sup>16</sup> In response to this disjointed approach, DDR practitioners at headquarters and country level of the UN system jointly began drafting the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS), a result of which is the current 2006 edition. The almost 800-page book, organized by 24 areas, dedicates significant number pages to discussing the issues surrounding children, youth, and gender, which were only covered superficially in the previous three guidelines.<sup>17</sup>

#### *Paris Commitments and Paris Principles 2007*

The latest addition to the set of international norms on child DDR (and an update of the Cape Town Principles mentioned above) the Paris Commitments and Principles “are the biggest step yet in two decades of international efforts to stop the use of child soldiers”.<sup>18</sup> Given that the objective of the Principles is to prevent unlawful recruitment of children or use by armed forces, adoption of the Principles by many countries demonstrates the political will behind such efforts. However, similar to Resolution 1612 and the IDDRS, the actual implementation of and expected action resulting from the Principles remain a big question mark.

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<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, “Security Council reviews progress made in implementing Resolution 1612” 25 July 2006 [http://www.unicef.org/protection/index\\_35071.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_35071.html) (accessed December 2007).

<sup>16</sup> UNDPKO, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration* (New York: UNDPKO, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> UN DDR Resource Center, “IDDRS Framework,” <http://www.unddr.org/iddrs/framework.php> (accessed 23 March 2008).

<sup>18</sup> International Herald Tribune, “Nations renew global commitment to stop the use of child soldiers”, 1 October, 2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/10/01/news/UN-GEN-UN-Child-Soldiers.php> (accessed 20 March 2008).

**APPENDIX – II**

**Approaches of International Organizations in Responding to Education Needs of Former Child Soldiers<sup>19</sup>**

	<b>Rights-Based Approach</b>	<b>Economic Approach</b>
<b>Objective</b>	Human security	Stability (discontinuation of violence)
<b>Target Group</b>	Children associated with armed groups and other war-affected children  Every child under 18 years old has a right to education	Mainly children associated with armed groups  Youth (15 to 24 years old)
<b>Instruments</b>	Legal norms and conventions	Economic policies on micro / macro level
<b>Main Characteristics</b>	Focus on protection, prevention, and advocacy  Former child soldiers are victims of violence and they are innocent. However, they are adaptive and resilient and can be constructive social actors  Participatory approach to involve children and local community in the process  Community capacity development	Focus on immediate results to separate young people from armed groups with economic incentives  Children and young people can be aggressive and greedy, and/or vulnerable. Thus, they are exploitable by armed groups. Economic approach provided them with skills and knowledge to be rational and resourceful economic actors  Participatory approach to involve children and local community in the process  Institutional capacity development / cooperation with the government
<b>Education Programs</b>	<i>Objective:</i> Reintegration into families and society,	<i>Objective:</i> Socio-economic reintegration

<sup>19</sup> Adapted from Kemper, Y. (2005). Youth in war-to-peace transitions - approaches of international organizations. Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management.

<p><b>Education Programs (Cont'd)</b></p>	<p>psychosocial well-being</p> <p><i>Activities:</i> Basic education; alternative education programs (e.g. catch-up/accelerated education); family livelihood development; supporting students to continue formal education</p>	<p><i>Activities:</i> Vocational training; income-generating activities; basic education (particularly math and reading skills); catch-up/accelerated education</p>
<p><b>Organizations</b> (those cited in the main text)</p>	<p>United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); Save the Children; Coalition to Stop Use of Child Soldiers (CSUCS); Christian Children's Fund; War Child</p>	<p>United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and its affiliated agencies (Office of Transition Initiatives - OTI); International Labor Organization (ILO); World Bank</p>

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