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CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT
A FIELD SCAN

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CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

AC4	Advanced Consortium for Cooperation, Conflict, and Complexity
ANSA	armed non-state actor
CAAC	children affected by armed conflict
CFS	child-friendly spaces
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CVE	countering violent extremism
DDR	disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECD	early childhood development
ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, formerly known as the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office
ECPC	Early Childhood Peace Consortium
FGM/C	female genital mutilation/cutting
GBV	gender-based violence
GCPEA	Global Coalition to Protection Education from Attack
HRC	Human Rights Council
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICRC	International Committee for the Red Cross
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia
IDP	internally displaced people
IHL	international humanitarian law
INGO	international non-government organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
MMC	Model Mobility Convention
MRM	Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism
NGO	non-government organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PILPG	Public International Law and Policy Group
PSS	psychosocial support
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
PVE	preventing violent extremism
SCR	Security Council Resolution
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEL	social and emotional learning
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
SRSG	Special Representative to the Secretary General
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or the UN Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WPS	Women, Peace, and Security

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to articulate the main trends and challenges in the field of children affected by armed conflict. Its objective is to summarize lessons learned over the last decade, provoke reflection, generate questions and suggest potential strategies to improve the lives of more than one billion children affected by violence and deprivation.

The challenges to the protection of children in war remain vast and present an array of thorny questions, provoked in part by such shifts as modern terrorism and the brutality of ISIL, Boko Haram and other armed non-state actors (ANSA). However, there are also seismic changes afoot in the field of forced displacement; there is likewise new thinking related to conflict and fragility that posits more dynamic understandings of the systems that create violence and deprivation. The European refugee crisis of 2015 has forced a reckoning with the international refugee architecture, challenging traditional mandates and approaches and prompting a global discussion regarding how the world approaches forced displacement. The international system is currently – and hopefully not just momentarily – focused on conflict prevention, driven in part by leadership from a new U.N. Secretary-General. These discussions create significant opportunities to improve and advance child rights and protection and to better situate these concerns within shifting approaches to global crises.

This paper was put forward as a "thought piece" to stimulate discussion for an August 2017 gathering of concerned practitioners, donors, and academics to rethink support to children affected by armed conflict and violence. Key questions guiding this paper include:

■ What are the drivers of violations of children's rights in settings affected by armed conflict?

■ What is the experience of displacement in today's conflicts? Where do children fit, and what are their concerns, vulnerabilities, and assets?

■ Have regulatory regimes and normative frameworks helped bolster rights and deter their violation?

■ How do field actors address these structural, systemic violations of children's rights?

■ What levers of deeper change are available to ensure children's rights, once the drivers of violations of these rights are understood? Are there tested solutions that have proven to be effective in operationalizing the levers of change?

Rather than providing an exhaustive review of research or practice across the numerous fields that have bearing on these issues, the paper focuses on key trends and situates child rights and protection within them. The goal is to articulate critical questions with the hope that others will highlight gaps and continue to raise important issues. The following discussion draws on a range of academic and applied literature as well as conversations with twelve experts. These individuals come from different institutions and points of reference (e.g., peacebuilding, forced displacement, human rights, child protection, etc.), to capture a range of perspectives about the conflict agenda and why or why not children's needs are adequately addressed.

This paper is organized into four sections. The first section examines current thinking in the fields of fragility, conflict, and forced displacement, seeking to address the question: what drives conflict, and who are the displaced in today's conflicts? Within that broad framework, we examine where children fit, and what are their concerns, vulnerabilities, and strengths? Section two focuses on global responses to conflict and displacement, examining key regulatory regimes – in particular, U.N. Security Council Resolution 1612 and the International Criminal Court – and the (moderate) success of these international policy and legal mechanisms to respond to abuses of child rights. Third, programmatic responses to child rights and protection in conflict settings are examined, considering major developments in thinking such as the shift from deficit to resilience approaches, the rise of systems thinking/ecological frameworks, and the evolution of the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD). Finally, recommendations are offered, geared towards researchers, policy-makers, donors, and practitioners to more effectively protect the rights and wellbeing of children in situations of conflict.

2. CURRENT APPROACHES TO FRAGILITY, CONFLICT, AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT: WHAT ARE MAIN CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES RELATED TO CHILD AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING?

The World Bank notes that two billion people now live in countries where development outcomes are affected by fragility, conflict, and violence.[1] In response, forced displacement has reached an all-time high, precipitating a global crisis involving 65 million refugees and internally displaced people, half of whom are estimated to be below the age of 18. A recent World Bank and UNHCR report notes that developing countries bear the overwhelming burden for the crisis of displacement, hosting 89 percent of refugees and 99 percent of internally displaced people. The same 10 conflicts have accounted for the majority of the forcibly displaced every year since 1991, consistently hosted by about 15 countries – also overwhelmingly in the developing world.[2] Poverty and conflict are inextricably linked, a reality that has prompted international actors to recognize that a sequential approach to humanitarian and development processes is untenable. As one expert noted, "Development agencies can no longer outsource the issue of forced displacement and refugees to the humanitarians."[3] Additionally, these actors must somehow better coordinate their work with the "political" institutions and organizations who most frequently deal with the non-humanitarian aspects of conflict.

Given that over half of those who flee are displaced for more than four years, there is increasing recognition that the humanitarian set of "tools," designed for short-term and acute crises, are insufficient. As if these figures aren't alarming enough, the percentage of extreme poor living in conflict-affected areas is expected to rise from 17% to 46% by 2030.[4] These staggering numbers have precipitated a reckoning with the global refugee architecture, discussed later in this section. The good news, however, is that this global crisis has catalyzed the need for new strategies, which creates opportunities for novel approaches to child rights and protection and better synergies with other agendas. This section focuses on current thinking related to fragility and conflict, trends and challenges related to the global refugee crisis, and ongoing "big picture" debates and dilemmas within the field of child protection and child rights.

NEW THINKING ON FRAGILITY AND CONFLICT

There is a vast body of scholarship regarding the "drivers" of conflict and forced displacement, and researchers have long noted the cyclical nature of violence and the relationship between fragility, increased violence, and conflict.[5] In the past, this literature has been organized around articulating structural factors that either directly or indirectly lead

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1   http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview

2   World Bank (2017). *Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced, and Their Hosts,* Washington, DC: World Bank. These conflicts include: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Colombia, the Caucasus, and the former Yugoslavia.

3   Interview, June 2017, Washington, D.C.

4   http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview

5   This paper concerns itself with forced displacement due to conflict versus migration for economic or other reasons. Civilians who are displaced because of violence and instability fall into a specific category under international law which corresponds to guaranteed protections, in contrast to other migrants. Many scholars note, however, that the distinction is not a hard and fast one.

to conflict. Key variables that have emerged over the last decade include: unemployment, economic grievances, rising expectations and inequality, urbanization, illicit financial flows, climate change, and demography. Additional themes that exacerbate conflict include: lack of security and justice; the status of inter-group relations, including a society's ability to promote reconciliation and tolerance between different social groups; and perceptions of equality. The World Development Report in 2011 noted that an economic decline of 5% increases the likelihood of conflict by 50%.[6] Saferworld asserts that countries not affected by conflict have significantly higher levels of trust in police, justice, and governance institutions, and further, inequality and corruption – and in particular, lack of access to land and property rights – were considered to be the primary drivers of conflict in five of the six countries included in a recent survey.[7] Finally, a growing body of quantitative literature has established a strong correlation between levels of structural/institutional gender-based violence (GBV) (manifested as gender inequality) and conflict. Researchers have found that gender inequality increases the likelihood that a state will have internal conflict. Further, there is a relationship between countries with low human rights standards (including on gender inequality) and the greater likelihood of having militarized and been involved in violent interstate disputes. Countries with high levels of interpersonal violence and national violence against women and girls (e.g. domestic violence, female infanticide, and sex-selective abortion) have been more likely to experience armed conflict.[8]

Shifting Nature of Fragility, Conflict, and Violence

Over the last three decades, scholarship has evolved in understanding what drives conflict; however, the nature of conflict itself has not shifted radically in the last ten years. Changes that have occurred are due to a few key factors including: increasingly regional or proxy wars, such as in Syria, where global powers perpetuate violence through their role in supporting various factions, the proliferation of armed non-state actors, the rise of global terrorism and other non-traditional forms of warfare, and organized violence that poses new security challenges. These are particularly concerning developments because the sets of

actors who promote such factors often specifically target civilians in armed conflict; central to their methodologies are the widespread and indiscriminate destruction of civilian infrastructure, a strategy that causes tremendous suffering. These developments certainly have specific impacts for youth and children, for example, making humanitarian assistance in war zones even more complex because those delivering assistance are increasingly targeted.

The methods of today's conflicts vary somewhat, as do the contexts, primarily in that they are increasingly urban and often involve new forms of technology. Humanitarian experts have argued for many years that the "refugee camp" (or "displaced people camp") model is outdated and that new methodologies for working with forcibly displaced populations must be systematized. The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) notes that "urban infrastructure and systems pose largescale technological and staffing problems for the maintenance of vital inter-connected services. The intensity and longevity of protracted conflicts also create greater expectations of sustainable and individualized services across a wide range of vulnerable groups."[9]

Despite the identification of the above factors, academics in the Advanced Consortium for Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity (AC4) at Columbia University's Earth Institute argue that the international community is facing two major challenges to sustaining peace: 1) researchers have overwhelmingly focused on causes of and responses to violence and aggression versus what maintains peaceful societies, and, thus, we have little understanding of peaceful systems; and 2) we are facing a "crisis of complexity," meaning we live in a highly interconnected new world order in which non-state actors such as billionaires, NGOs, terrorists, computer hackers and "disruptors" (sometimes positive, sometimes spreading disinformation) have tremendous influence, and in which information will soon double every 12 hours. Researchers are in the process of working to identify key factors that maintain peaceful systems, including the absence of the type of drivers mentioned above. To better determine policy and programmatic intervention points, we need a much better understanding of complex adaptive systems as well as how local, national, and international situations that involve dozens, if not hundreds, of factors are interconnected and react to each other. Preliminary findings suggest that

6   World Bank. (2011). *World Development Report* 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development. Washington, DC: World Bank.

7   http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/708-issue-paper-2-what-are-the-key-challenges-what-works-in-addressing-thema

8   See: Caprioli, M. (2005), Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict, *International Studies Quarterly*, 9(2): 161-178. Also: Hudson, et al., 2008.

9   https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/protracted_conflict_and_humanitarian_action_icrc_report_lr_29.08.16.pdf

community-initiated programs are usually more durable, inclusive (of women and youth in particular), and effective at sustaining peace.[10]

These shifts and challenges have particular implications for children: high levels of displacement mean that education and family structures are disrupted; the countries where children are likely to be hosted when they are displaced are themselves poor, so already-stretched resources and systems are further strained; displacement creates extremely perilous situations for children and youth, possibly causing them to become separated from families or caretakers and/or to become vulnerable to traffickers, gangs, or other negative draws; the disruption of livelihoods promotes child labor; and children at times try to stay "invisible," particularly in urban settings, out of fear of being "returned," a factor that makes service provision challenging. As one expert noted, the mere challenge of enumeration of children is immense: "The reality is that a lot of kids are off the statistical map…These kids are out of sight, out of mind – and in fact, may be actively trying to stay under the radar [so they can participate in the informal economy, etc.]."[11] This challenge has become more difficult, particularly as the refugee crisis has overwhelmed new contexts such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Macedonia, Greece, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. Conflicts now attract a 24/7 global media sector, which has been a matter of concern for child rights advocates who argue that pictures of children can be instrumentalized and lead to their exploitation. While these images may provoke a sentimental response and a brief outpouring of resources, such tactics usually do not lead the type of political mobilization necessary to end a conflict and the related suffering in the first place.[12] Finally, conflict settings involve so many complex factors that understanding key intervention points is extremely difficult. Responses to conflict by international actors tend to be siloed and uncoordinated. Indeed, coordinating – or even understanding – a broad universe of complex factors that would enable more systematic identification of appropriate intervention points feels insurmountable, yet when making choices, international actors have also tended to rely on overly-securitized approaches and institution-building when it is increasingly clear that amidst tremendous complexity, supporting local communities and peacebuilders is often the most constructive form of action.[13]

GLOBAL REFUGEE CRISIS – LOOMING PROBLEMS AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

The refugee crisis in 2015 led to widespread acknowledgement of the urgent need for a massive overhaul of the international refugee architecture. Forced migration has historically been considered through a humanitarian paradigm, and it has become clear that this set of tools in insufficient. A humanitarian framing is short-term in nature, meant to address an acute crisis, whereas the majority of refugees spend years displaced and often don't end up returning home. Those migrating due to conflict have a particular set of vulnerabilities, which include loss of assets, lack of legal rights and opportunities, and perpetually living in uncertainty. Providing assistance to refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) within the humanitarian assistance framework enables governments to outsource the resources and responsibility for their care to agencies like UNHCR. The ineffectiveness of this tactic is evident through the lack of global capital to provide for the growing forced migrant population. As one expert noted, "The refugee system is just not working . . . Syrians and Afghans voted with their feet, by leaving Turkey and Jordan and going to Europe."[14]

Institutions like the World Bank and the United Nations recognize that to achieve poverty reduction and other goals to which countries have committed, like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is imperative to work across development and humanitarian silos. This recognition has led to several important developments, including a global dialogue around whether it was feasible to re-write the 1951 Refugee Convention to better address the nature of today's displacement issues. The answer was no, yet UNHCR and IOM are leading efforts to create new global compacts - the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly Migration, respectively – that better acknowledge both the nature of displacement and the capacity of international and national/local actors to respond. A parallel effort is underway to ensure that both Global Compacts reflect a common approach to the rights of children who are forcibly displaced. Called the Initiative for Child Rights in the Global Compacts, this process has three primary components: the elaboration of a working document that articulates goals and indicators through which commitments to child rights can be operationalized across both Compacts; a global conference on "children on the move" that was hosted in Berlin in June of 2017; and a

10 Coleman, P., Douglas, F. Liebovitch, L., et. al. The Science of Sustaining Peace: Ten Preliminary Lessons from the Human Peace Project. New York: Columbia University.

11 Interview, June 2017, Washington D.C.

12 https://www.crin.org/en/library/publications/media-representations-children-news-media-revisiting-oslo-challenge#im

13 UNDP (2017). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment. New York: United Nations: http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org.

14 Interview, June 2017, Washington, D.C.

follow-on advocacy strategy on how to promote the outcomes of these processes.[15] One expert noted, "[The Global Compact] is likely to include some very useful elements on reducing long term displacement and local integration. But it is likely as well to be quite conservative." A second parallel effort, called the Model Mobility Convention (MCC), covers both economic migrants and refugees and is designed to be "a realistic utopia, to push the boundaries beyond what current governments are likely to accept" rather than to reflect the lowest common denominator to which all governments will agree.[16]

The major overhaul of these processes presents a significant opportunity to build on them. Work is already underway to produce a complimentary set of recommendations specifically focused on the needs of youth and children; related advocacy to ensure that these findings are adopted is necessary.

This is a pivotal moment due to momentum in several key places: the drive to change the refugee system, a renewed focus on conflict prevention, and a call to support governments that host refugees to articulate their own agendas. While donor governments and multilateral agencies have complicated histories of promoting at-times harmful practices, forced migration experts note that the multilateral system is becoming less driven by international agencies and that there is more space for national governments to communicate their own strategies and goals.[17] There is also more capacity amongst host governments, even in complicated and resources scarce places like East Africa. Donors will always have their own (often disparate) priorities; the only way to get coherence is for the host country to set its own agenda and then engage the international community on how to be helpful. In the past, host governments have rarely been given the space by international actors to set the agenda; however, there may be opportunities for international actors to work with local partners to encourage this shift, and doing so is important to addressing some of the entrenched dysfunction of the current approach to conflict and crisis.

While this shift to letting national governments lead is exciting, the challenges related to integrating refugees are massive, and refugee integration may not be going well: the headline of a June 2017 Economist article notes, "Turkey is taking care of refugees, but failing to integrate them." The author points out that the level of service provided to refugees in camps across Southeastern Turkey is commendable, including air-conditioned units that boast a kitchen, bedrooms, and a washing machine; however, while Syrians have access to these and other major benefits, like the Turkish health care system, Turkey has not granted Syrians full refugee status or a path to citizenship. This lack of status impacts their ability to work and access education: "At the start of last year, Turkey allowed Syrians to apply for work permits. To date, it has issued fewer than 20,000, corresponding to perhaps 1% of the working-age refugee population. About 500,000 others have entered Turkey's shadow economy, where they are routinely exploited. Education is an equally large problem. Of the 900,000 school-age Syrian children, less than 60% are enrolled in schools. Just 18% attend normal schools, as opposed to temporary learning centres like the ones in the camps." The author cautions that developing a "permanent Syrian underclass" is in no one's interest and there may well problems of social unrest on the horizon as Turkey has done little to ease tensions between the refugee camps and neighboring communities.[18]

Donors and experts must play a role in facilitating the development of a new and more relevant refugee architecture, and there is a huge need to articulate how the wellbeing of children can be taken into account in these processes. Donors can also play a large role in encouraging and empowering host governments to integrate refugees – who we know are statistically unlikely to return home any time soon – by providing technical expertise on a vast range of issues of which education may be the most crucial. Since the post-World War II Marshall plan, the international community has consolidated decades of expertise in building systems and working with communities to address the needs of conflict-affected populations. This expertise can be utilized particularly to address the needs of children by helping these countries to adapt educational systems and strategies to particular socio-developmental needs; by creating systems and structures to give refugees access to social welfare benefits, including particular supports to parents; by engaging youth as conflict resolvers and peacebuilders to build relationships between refugee and host populations; by creating economic opportunities for

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15 See: http://www.childrenonthemove.org/ and http://www.cpcnetwork.org/event/march-22-2017-global-compact-on-refugees/

16 Ibid.

17 These critiques are well-documented, see: Anderson, M., Brown, D. & Jean, I. (2012) *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid*. Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects; also, Anderson (2010); Autesserre (2014); Reiff (2003); Polman (2011); Uvin (1998).

18 https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21724413-if-syrians-become-permanent-underclass-country-headed-trouble-turkey-taking-care

young people to ease the financial burden of displacement on families; and by helping countries to manage the organizational processes and to articulate strategies to deal with these overwhelming issues. Addressing any of these issues will require diplomatic engagement and advocacy to get governments to take these points up with partners as well as technical and financial resources.

The vast majority of the world's refugees continue to be hosted by countries outside of Europe; however, migration to European countries in 2015 and 2016 illustrated some of the particular risks to children and the gaps in systems to support this population, many of which are generalizable. One alarming concern has been "missing and disappearing" children, the number of whom has been estimated by some media sources as 10,000.[19] The Oxford University Faculty of Law states that questions have emerged over the last year about the "conditions and situations into which [these children] are disappearing," noting that child refugees "not only leave one site of exploitation (i.e., the state of conflict in their home country), but are increasingly made vulnerable to other zones of exploitation through their migration…[highlighting] the multiple, inter-related causes of deprivation that child refugees experience and the manner in which acts of criminality may occur as the by-product of coercive circumstances and 'alternative' techniques of survival."[20] Key challenges in addressing this issue include the lack of host countries' infrastructure to support unaccompanied minors, such as the ability to document and register children and the complex processes of verifying the identity of adults who claim to be relatives. This problem becomes exacerbated in Europe amidst the tightening border control restrictions as minors fall prey to the fear of getting sent back to conflict zones and seek to become "invisible" to continue on their journey. While there are INGOs and other organizations providing technical assistance to European governments on how to develop systems to better track and integrate refugees in general, this issue of refugee children has gotten relatively little media attention and been subsumed in the narrative of fear around immigrants: "While political leaders and policy makers have been concerned about the likely 'risks' of incorporating immigrants and refugees in European nation-states, little attention has been paid to the conditions that not only deprive unaccompanied children of their rights but also coerce them into further acts of criminality.

Who constitutes a greater risk and to whom?"[21] This example demonstrates several challenges of integration particularly related to youth and children, including the lack of systems, types of threats, their ability to become "invisible," and the larger political climate which may encourage this behavior.

PREVENTION – PROGRESS AT LAST?

In addition to the above new patterns of conflict and related challenges for forcibly displaced children, research and practice have acknowledged that there are massive contextual differences across conflicts and impacts, from situations of prolonged displacement (e.g., Burmese refugees in Thailand) to ongoing armed conflict (e.g., Syria, Yemen, South Sudan). Experts have tried to reimagine the concept of "fragility," which is clearly itself a driver of conflict, to generate a more nuanced understanding of varied environments and, ultimately, how to prevent war. Much as the concept of systems thinking has become popular across many fields of humanitarian and development assistance, the research on fragility has also evolved away from static check lists that "define" fragility, and even the notion of "drivers," to a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of the types of risk factors that create fragile states and their inter-relationships.

A series of papers including one by the World Bank in 2012 entitled, *Society Dynamics and Fragility: Engaging Societies in Responding to Fragile States* and a subsequent OECD report in 2015 posited a new approach to the annual listing of "fragile states." Instead of classifying contexts as fragile or non-fragile, the new approach will cluster contexts according to the type(s) and/or number of risks they face, and will seek to ascertain whether these vulnerabilities are being addressed."[22] The recently published joint World Bank and United Nations report, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, shifts the focus away from the centrality of building institutions (as specified in the 2011 World Development Report on conflict) towards three core elements: institutions, structural factors (e.g., geography, including who your neighbors are, ethnic make-up, etc.) and the idea of "agency" (e.g., political will, actors, including the strength of civil society,

19   http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37617234

20   https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2016/09/story-%E2%80%98missing

21   Ibid.

22   http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTCPR/Resources/407739-1313432470798/Fragility-Summary-WEB.pdf; and, OECD (2015). *States of Fragility 2015*: Meeting Post-2015 Ambitions, OECD Publishing: Paris.

armed groups, etc.).[23] Of course, there is a relationship between poverty and conflict; however, this thinking also moves away from the idea that poverty "causes" conflict. In line with the research on complexity conducted by the Columbia AC4 group, the World Bank posits that there can be no one cause of conflict, which is a product of constellation of dynamics. Another important feature of this work is that it puts the idea of "grievances" at the center of this model. Institutions are important, particularly rule of law and governance mechanisms, but a focus at this level is insufficient to account for patterns of exclusion and inequality that, in the presence of other dynamics within the three above pillars, can trigger violence. We only have to look at the United States today to note that there are plenty of grievances that don't lead to violent conflict; however, when you add exclusion to these patterns of "moderating variables" (i.e., pre-existing conditions), the hypothesis is that this is when violence can erupt. To prevent violence, it is necessary to strengthen the factors in the three pillars AND to address inequality, a combiation which will reduce the volatility of this system.

This new understanding of what causes fragility and ultimately violent conflict also enables a different calculus for which tools can be deployed to mitigate any number of risk factors for increased fragility and conflict. It is commonly understood amongst conflict practitioners that prevention rather than reaction is essential to addressing the magnitude of impacts of today's conflicts: "many actors recognize that their efforts have remained reactive and fragmented – that they have struggled to mainstream a coherent preventative agenda in situations vulnerable to conflict… and still haven't successfully focused on upstream prevention of conflict."[24] A 2016 paper by Mercy Corps makes clear the astounding lack of resources that are funneled into prevention activities and related research. The authors note that only 4% of the world's foreign assistance is spent on conflict prevention-related activities in fragile countries and only 1% in developing environments.[25] The joint World Bank-UN study notes that "targeting resources towards just four countries at high risk of conflict each year could prevent $34 billion in losses."[26] However, the previous over-emphasis on responding to conflict rather than

preventing it may also be shifting as the current U.N. Secretary General has placed a huge emphasis on conflict prevention and the "sustaining peace" agenda. These new trends prompt us to consider: what opportunities are created by new thinking about prevention, fragility, violence, and the global refugee architecture that can bolster child rights and provide better outcomes to youth and children? There may be new openings to synergize the child protection agenda with this contemporary thought, which parallels many of the developments within the child protection field (e.g. socio-ecological and systems approaches). This will be an important task for the community of practice working on child protection issues in the next few years. One point of entry may be in figuring out how to operationalize this new thinking about "constellations of fragility and resilience" through programming (discussed in section three). An important aspect of these changes is that there may (finally) be particular space to focus more on grassroots actors and bottom-up methodologies, highlighting the critical work of NGOs on child rights issues and taking a systems approach to building resiliency in countries that struggle with numerous "fragility factors."

DEBATES AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO CHILD RIGHTS AND PROTECTION

There are several ongoing tensions and debates related to child rights and protection, including different perspectives on "child rights" versus "child protection," questions related to whether the category "child protection" is useful, and the various ways in which work on child rights and protection issues have been siloed and largely understood within a humanitarian/development versus a human rights/political lens. These tensions have emerged for good reasons as part of a rational debate within the sector, but promoting concerns about children will require actors to move beyond the binaries.

CHILD RIGHTS VERSUS CHILD PROTECTION

Myers and Bourdillon address the relationship between child rights and protection, noting that there are two trends in the field that at times conflict. The first approach implies the "universalization" of a set of norms based on international law and their implementation through government-led bureaucracies. A second approach is called "contextualization" which, based on empirical findings of community development, calls

23 https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337
24 Saferworld, 2013.
25 Mercy Corps (2016). *An Ounce of Prevention: Why increasing investment in conflict prevention is worth more than "a pound of cure" in addressing the displacement crisis.* Portland: OR.
26 *Pathways* for Peace, p. 2.

for adapting human rights principles to the context and to the needs of particular cultures, communities, families and children."[27] The "child rights" camp advocates for these universal conditions and their necessity for societies to protect children. The "child protection" camp argues that such norms are based on an idealized Western notion of childhood that doesn't exist, developed to address challenges faced by children who were in the minority and not faced by whole communities or societies. Child protection advocates argue that the "rights" approach is based on a deficits model which encourages "rescuing" children and removing them from their families – an act that often deprives children of social support and can actually place them at greater risk in most parts of the world. International human rights are necessary as guiding principles, but these frameworks and Western approaches must be tempered and implemented in ways that are contextually rooted with the objective of articulating both top-down and bottom-up strategies that strengthen local resources and systems to protect children's rights.

These perspectives have radically different implications for issues that affect children; for example, a long-standing debate exists over whether to impose a minimum work age. Proponents of the "rights" perspective think this is important whereas others feel that such norms are detrimental unless they are contextually-determined. These differing approaches also affect issues of children in armed conflict. For example, one of the major challenges for girls in conflict is forced marriage, which is sometimes encouraged by families and welcomed by girls themselves as it can provide security and a measure of stability. Of course, marriage of underage girls is often illegal and certainly not a practice to encourage; however, if we examine the situation from the girls' perspective and attempt to understand their needs, a situation that may seem black and white may not always be so. These questions also impact the recruitment of child soldiers, for example, considering when circumstances push children to join armed groups (an outcome often called "voluntary" recruitment although use of them term "voluntary" is

questionable). Human Rights Watch notes that in South Sudan, the recruitment and use of child soldiers has been a "hallmark" of the many cycles of war in that country. In a 2015 report, the authors describe abuses suffered by child soldiers common to many conflicts, including inadequate sleep, food, medical care, or preparation for combat. Yet, they state, "Despite all these hardships, some said they felt grateful to their commanders for taking them in. In the midst of a grossly abusive conflict, they believed that being part of an armed group afforded them some protection, and also the opportunity to fight to protect their community or to fulfill their desire for revenge for attacks or abuses."[28]

These examples are offered to illustrate that these problems – and children's own understandings of their wellbeing – are complex. Responses generated from 30,000 feet may seem like moral truths to be applied universally; however, the importance of tailoring human rights approaches to the context are essential. Innovative protective mechanisms are needed in the direst settings that would enable children to get their basic needs met, including safety, security, and affiliation.

Another important question to consider is the extent to which the emphasis on gross human rights abuses in conflict has pushed humanitarian aid workers and the international community to apply a deficits lens to understanding children's lives. This approach places the focus on direct violence and grave violations, such as those described above, rather than structural violence, such as loss of cultural tradition and heritage and disruptions to community, school, and family supports. This may be a dynamic that is true across the conflict field – that is, the prevalence of applying international human rights law and other legal lenses may lend themselves to a focus on direct violence and phenomena that seem tangible versus structural violence such as the loss of community, identity, and culture as well as interruption to educational opportunities and other societal systems. This is a tension between the fields of human rights and peacebuilding; concepts in the latter area, including positive and negative peace, may also prove helpful in reimagining the most pressing issues of concern for children affected by conflict and addressing their root

27 Myers, W. & Bourdillon, M. (2012). Introduction: development, children, and protection, *Development in Practice*, 22:4, 437-447.

28 https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/12/14/we-can-die-too/recruitment-and-use-child-soldiers-south-sudan.

causes.[29],[30] Evidence discussed in section three of this paper suggests that these types of interruptions of systems can cause significant distress for children. It is equally important to understand children's experiences so that community reconstruction and reintegration strategies don't merely mirror Western approaches and actually achieve their ends through a more nuanced contextually-grounded approach, including of children's resilience.[31]

THE CHALLENGES OF SILOS: IS "CHILD PROTECTION" A USEFUL CATEGORY? WHERE DOES IT "SIT" IN CONFLICT RESPONSE?

There is a widely shared belief that interventions for children affected by armed conflict continue to suffer from the "silo effect." Some classic "child protection" actors are shifting from an era of attempting to adopt a "systems approach" that would work preventively to address a host of deprivations that children face to a new concentration specifically on violence and exploitation. In addition, there has been little attention paid to how the concept of child protection – and fundamentally, the needs and experiences of children – are related to other trends in the broader field of conflict, including conflict and atrocity prevention, stabilization efforts, and, most recently, countering violent extremism. There is also new momentum for creating a separate "sector" of work around early childhood development in emergency settings. Separately, then, violence reduction partnerships and early childhood development (ECD) in emergencies initiatives are being promoted for children; at the same time, the

humanitarian cluster system has divvied child protection from gender-based violence, creating separate and distinct interventions for these two "areas of responsibility." Within the field of human rights, children are not often at the fore of policy-makers' and funders' concerns in conflict settings unless the focus is on particular phenomena (e.g., child soldiers, sexual and gender-based violence, trafficking). Thought leaders and seasoned practitioners are raising concern that international efforts to protect children in complex emergencies are ineffective, in part because a better understanding of where to structurally place these issues so that they can be effectively addressed is needed.

Questions have also been raised regarding the utility of the "child protection" classification. Does this encourage reactions to harm as opposed to proactively establishing an enabling environment where children flourish? Even in the most adverse situations, would a focus on "child and youth wellbeing" encourage more proactive promotion of wellbeing and be more useful than "protection"? Further, does the use of the word "child" interrupt thinking that is focused on the life span, causing the greatest attention to be paid to young children?

The child protection field has shifted in important ways to address the above questions, more fully taken up in the programming discussion of this paper. However, some of the challenges are worth noting here, particularly regarding adapting these findings to a war zone. How do you effectively promote "systems programming" in conflict? If formal systems exist, they are chaotic. Family and community networks often bear the brunt of conflict and are likely overstretched by contextual challenges and have little resilience. The issue of intervention silos is a hallmark of conflicts and complex emergencies and a pervasive challenge that must be addressed, yet there is no clear administrative process to move forward. The lack of a comprehensive life-span approach in practice tends to increase focus on particular human rights issues (e.g., female genital mutilation/cutting [FGM/C], child marriage, trafficking, child soldiers) and development areas (e.g., nutrition, ECD). The U.N. Inter-Agency Standing Committee, which manages a cluster approach to development/humanitarian emergencies, can also contribute to silos because child protection falls primarily within the "humanitarian" line of effort. Within this sphere, there is discussion of creating a separate line of effort on ECD which runs the risk of further bifurcating work on child protection and moving the needle so far towards young children that older children and adolescents remain in the shadows.

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29 Positive peace refers to both the absence of war, conflict, or direct violence (negative peace) and the presence of pre-requisites necessary for sustainable peace and human development, including equitable relations between genders, races, classes, and families, and an absence of structural violence, the non-intended slow, massive suffering caused by economic and political structures of exploitation and repression. See: Galtung, J., *Peace by Peaceful Means,* London: SAGE Publications, 1996.

30 The challenge of operationalizing constructs related rights and protection versus more concrete health and development activities has been a long-standing concern; for example, child survival (e.g., health, nutrition, and other responses to address children's physical welfare, such as water, sanitation, shelter, and medical assistance) has been more successfully "mainstreamed" than child protection. This argument could be made across the peacebuilding or human rights or democracy and governance fields in general – all of these sectors pertain to creating an "environment" where peace, human development, and dignity can be sustained. Despite advances in articulating activities in these areas, concrete programmatic actions remain harder for many to envision than in other development fields such as public health.

31 See: Wessells, M. (2009). *Child Soldiers,* Cambridge: MA, Harvard University Press.

Finally, in practice, there is an inherent tension between a rights framing, which is quickly perceived as political, versus a humanitarian framing, which is perceived as "neutral" and purely intended to meet the needs of the vulnerable. A rights-based approach to children and armed conflict can generate backlash from those on the receiving end of foreign assistance who question the hypocrisy of Western donor governments or organizations on human rights issues. Older children and young adults can turn from being perceived as benign actors in need of protection to being potential political threats, particularly in a security-focused counter-terrorism paradigm. Whereas child protection programming largely falls to humanitarians, programming for older children and adolescents – which can include citizen engagement and efforts to "promote democracy" – are often totally separate and managed by human rights, and/or democracy and governance entities. As one expert stated, "Anything rights-based becomes political whereas development seems less political and more just humanitarian assistance – no one has a problem with development but as soon as you start using 'rights,' no one will sign anything. Also, [Western countries] don't always practice what we preach so we look hypocritical as soon as we start talking about rights."[32]

There have been important efforts to overcome these divisions within governments, such as the United States Government Action Plan for Children in Adversity, yet issues related to the wellbeing of children in emergencies still seem to be taken up more systematically by humanitarian actors and less so by human rights actors.[33] These remain challenging questions; there are important ways in which the humanitarian community can learn from the human rights community, perhaps particularly related to strengthening civil society and accountability institutions, and documenting – and deterring – abuses. Equally, human rights actors would be wise to learn from the humanitarian and development fields, especially regarding grounding protection mechanisms in communities and avoiding top-down, prescriptive and institution-centered approaches. However, if some of these silos were to be bridged, the question remains about who – what agency or actor – would actually be responsible for making these types of connections in practice. Given political realities and security concerns,

including the fact that humanitarian personnel are already increasingly targeted in war, considering how to adapt strengths from both of these perspectives and leverage them for better outcomes for kids who live amidst violent conflict in practice remains difficult.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION FROM THIS SECTION

- How can the child protection community seize the momentum in the international landscape on fragility, forced migration, conflict prevention, and sustaining peace to re-think, synergize, and build allies on the child rights agenda?

- Could ongoing parallel efforts to the Global Compacts on Refugees and on Safe, Orderly Migration as well as the Model Mobility Convention, efforts that specifically articulate needs related to youth and child wellbeing, be amplified?

- Integration of children and youth refugees into host country systems – this is a new frontier, and there are many questions related to how to do this effectively, including adapting education and social welfare systems appropriately.

- Is it possible to bridge some of these persistent silos, and how would this actually be done in practice? Who would make the decision to move away from current approaches? Does it make sense to further fragment the child rights field into various "sub" lines of effort? Is it possible to adapt key elements and tools of a "rights" approach (e.g. the documentation of violations and the deterrence of abuses through the legal system) and utilize them within a "protection" approach? Would child rights and protection be better served if they were more integrated into the "political" machinery of the international system and not cordoned off into humanitarian and development spheres? How would this actually be done in practice when "no one will sign anything" rights-based?

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32 Interview, June 2017, Washington, D.C.
33 U.S. Government Action Plan on Children in Adversity: https://www.childreninadversity.gov/docs/default-source/default-document-library/apca.pdf?sfvrsn=2.

3. WHERE DO CONCERNS RELATED TO CHILDREN AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICT (CAAC) "SIT" WITHIN BROADER REGULATORY MECHANISMS TO PROTECT CHILD RIGHTS, AND HAVE THESE MECHANISMS BEEN EFFECTIVE IN DETERRING THEIR VIOLATION?

In the last 15 years, a range of normative frameworks have been adopted and international mechanisms utilized to defend child rights and deter their abuse – for example, the Special Court for Sierra Leone's conviction of Charles Taylor for aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity, which included sexual violence and his use of child soldiers. These are important developments in creating an international architecture that places child protection squarely among other violations of human rights and conflict-related issues. Nonetheless, there are concerns that these frameworks have not been sufficiently implemented or utilized, and children's rights remains at the margins of the international community's work on conflict. This section summarizes of the development of important tools and examines several key international policy and legal mechanisms to respond to child rights abuses, in particularly Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 2250 and the International Criminal Court. The section also looks at some significant challenges to these mechanisms, namely the issue of armed non-state actors (ANSA).

U.N. MECHANISMS, INCLUDING SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS 1612 AND 2250

The UN system has increasingly recognized the need to protect civilians in conflict, and particularly children. Multiple mechanisms with this intent have been implemented over the last 30 years, beginning with the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) in 1989, followed by the publication of the Graça Michel report on the impact of armed conflict on children, presented to the General Assembly in 1996. This spurred the creation of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Children in Armed Conflict that same year. The decade between 1999 and 2010 saw the adoption of many key mechanisms to protect children in the UN system, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict in 2002, which as of December 2016 had been ratified 166 times. The most central mechanism is Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1612 on children and armed conflict (2006), which was followed by SCR 2250 on youth, peace, and security (2015). In 1998, the first SRSG, Olara Otunnu, declared, "Words on paper cannot save children in

peril."[34] Volumes of words on paper have been generated, and some progress has also been made in implementing them and saving imperiled lives. Monitoring and reporting mechanisms have been established, and resolutions on children have been adopted. The Paris Principles have tried to ensure that child soldiers are treated primarily as victims and not perpetrators and that there are sufficient resources to support their reintegration; there has also been global action to declare Safe Schools and a strong international commitment to end sexual violence against children in conflict. Ending the use of child soldiers has been a paramount focus of these efforts over the last two decades.

In an effort not to silo these issues amongst only humanitarian or "political" actors, the children and armed conflict mandate is structurally linked to several parts of the UN, including humanitarian, development and human rights arms: the SRSG reports to the General Assembly as well as to the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva. The latter links the mandate to the Universal Periodic Review process, an important tool that enables an in-depth look at specific countries' status and connects their actual progress on CAAC to their commitments before the HRC – often utilized as a means of behind-the-scenes diplomatic pressure.

The Secretary-General also presents an *Annual Report on Children in Armed Conflict* to the Security Council, providing a global overview of CAAC and covering two types of situations: those on the agenda of the Security Council and those not on the agenda of the Security Council but still warranting attention within the CAAC mandate. There are currently five grave violations of children's rights that are "triggers" for "listing" (i.e., landing an armed force or group in the annual report as a violator): recruitment and use of children; killing and maiming; rape and sexual violence as a tool of war; deliberate attacks on schools and hospitals; and abduction of children. Denial of humanitarian access is another category that is monitored but is not a formal trigger. SCR 1612 lies at the heart of this process, and its adoption signified a turning point from the era of building norms to one of implementation.

SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1612

SCR 1612 put specific violations of children's rights in war at the center of the Security Council's thematic work, strengthening its focus on child soldiers, rape and sexual violence against children, and, more recently, attacks on education. This resolution set out important advancements on the ground through a "required" – but unfunded -- Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), the mandate of which is "to provide timely, accurate, and reliable information on the recruitment and use of children and other violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict."[35] In particular, the MRM collects information about the trigger categories to determine whether countries are listed in the SRSG's annual report.

The resolution also requires parties to conflict to prepare concrete, time-bound action plans to halt the recruitment and use of children and attaches the possibility of sanctions for those that fail to do so. Finally, the resolution also mandates a subsidiary: the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Consisting of all 15 members of the Council, this body is tasked with reviewing information provided by the MRM on country situations and empowered to take concrete actions such as making recommendations regarding sanctions and other accountability mechanisms. The question is, has this architecture actually deterred the violation of children's rights?

There has been progress in terms of strengthening and implementing the UN Security Council's agenda on CAAC – for example, a 2009 report by Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict ("Watchlist") notes that at that time, only nine out of 64 armed forces and groups listed in the SRSG's annual report had signed action plans to stop the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and further, those action plans were limited to child soldiers and didn't include other "trigger" categories such as rape and grave sexual violence against children.[36] In contrast, a March 2017 Watchlist *Policy Note* states: "The UN Security Council's Children and Armed Conflict agenda, and its field-based MRM, have yielded many positive results: More than 100,000 children have been released by armed forces or armed groups and, as of 2016, all government security forces listed for recruitment and use have adopted action

34 https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Twenty-Years-of-Work-Updated-Booklet_web.pdf

35 https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Twenty-Years-of-Work-Updated-Booklet_web.pdf

36 http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/policypaper_09.pdf

plans to end and prevent that violation. Attention to grave violations now extends beyond child recruitment. For example, the Safe Schools Declaration expressing political commitments to protect schools from military use was adopted in 2015 and, as of January 2017, has been endorsed by 57 Member States."[37]

And yet, violations of children's rights continue to occur at an alarming rate, often with impunity. Some of the challenges with the MRM process are discussed below.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCR 1612 MRM

Over time, a body of tools has emerged related to the effective utilization of the MRM, including several extensive reports published by UNICEF which clarify roles, processes and obligations of UN staff, and evaluate the impact of the MRM. A landmark effort by Watchlist, updated in 2015, provides guidance to civil society organizations on how to engage with the MRM.[38] These documents attempt to address some of the challenges to collecting accurate and reliable information. For example, due to security issues and access restriction, one perennial issue in war zones has been direct access to information; however, it is logical that places where access to information is limited or blocked are simultaneously where violations of rights are most frequent and the resources to address them most scarce. The UNICEF report on establishing good practices for utilizing the MRM acknowledges these challenges and suggests processes and procedures to remedy them (e.g., through ideas for remote monitoring, networking with local actors when possible, etc.)[39] In general, these reports indicate that the MRM has been useful as: a guiding framework to systematically monitor and publicize human rights violations against children; a platform to engage in constructive dialogue with parties to a conflict; and an opportunity to link programmatic responses to reported violations. However, independent research demonstrates that the information collected represents only a small fraction of the total number of grave violations of children's rights in conflict-affected settings, and there are significant problems with the politicization of the information collected, often by civil society actors.

An in-depth 2015 study conducted by Columbia University's Program on Forced Migration and Health examined attacks on education in North and South Kivu provinces, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Mogadishu, Somalia.[40],[41] The authors acknowledge that reporting on attacks against education in conflict have improved over time. UNESCO's annual Education Under Attack – now compiled by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) – has called significant attention to these violations and furthered the international community's ability to effectively monitor and respond to them. Established in 2010, GCPEA is comprised of many key organizations from the fields of education in emergencies, human rights, and conflict response who are dedicated to the protection of students, teachers, schools, and universities. This group engages in extensive advocacy efforts to promote more rigorous monitoring of attacks against education and to use that information to inform effective response and prevention, including accountability for perpetrators.[42] High profile situations such as the Taliban's 2012 attack on Malala Yousafzai for her advocacy efforts related to girls' education have also increased global awareness. However, the authors of the Columbia study note that MRM has significant limitations: "The MRM operates in a limited number of situations that are of high concern to the Security Council, and reports must pass rigorous UN-verification procedures that are not always feasible in times of insecurity, meaning that many cases are likely to go unreported. Moreover, the MRM has traditionally limited its scope to direct attacks on schools that violate international humanitarian law, focusing less on higher education and indirect acts that may interfere with the right to education, like the military use of schools."[43]

Findings from the DRC/Somalia study indicated significant attacks occurred in both countries, yet, paradoxically, the protection of education was considered a "low priority" for humanitarian and development actors. This discouraged others from monitoring and reporting abuses given that

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37 http://watchlist.org/wp-content/uploads/watchlist_2017-annual-report-putting-childrens-rights-up-front_lr.pdf

38 UNICEF 2012; Watchlist 2017. Watchlist 2017; UNICEF 2015.

39 UNICEF 2012.

40 Bennouna, C., Elburg van Boetzelaar, Rojas, L., Roberts, L. & Boothby, N. Monitoring and Reporting to Enhance the Protection of Education in Situations of Insecurity and Conflict: Synthesis Report, unpublished manuscript (*Disasters*, 2017).

41 The authors define attacks on education to include: intimidation, threat, theft, extortion, indoctrination, recruitment, abduction, kidnapping, arbitrary detainment, injury, abuse, torture, sexual- or gender-based violence, forced labor, forced marriage, and murder, whether in school or on the way to school, as well as military use of schools (i.e. for shelter, for storage of arms), forced closure of schools, and partial or total destruction of school buildings or other facilities, by an armed group.

42 See: http://www.protectingeducation.org/who-we-are

43 Ibid., p. 3

their efforts were perceived as unlikely to have impact. Most alarmingly, the findings from the DRC and Somalia indicated that MRM was only capturing a fraction of violations. The rigorous standard of information for reporting, lack of human resources within the UN system, and justifiable fear of reprisal for "reporters" meant that a significant number of incidents never even made it into the UN's database.

This study is part of a body of work conducted by Columbia over many years related to the MRM in various contexts, all with similar findings. Despite the intent of the MRM, we actually do not have an accurate sense of how widespread these types of violations are; therefore, we don't understand the true risk to educators and students. Additional problems include the lack of linkages between formal reporting channels that are connected to law enforcers, humanitarian responders, and referral resources that can provide support to victims when available. Closer coordination between education and protection clusters is also needed to enhance communication and coordination of service delivery. Finally, it is unclear that there are any actual consequences associated with these violations; ensuring that perpetrators are punished would likely improve the volume and quality of reporting as people would believe more in their value. This is a circular problem, because the lack of prevalence data impedes bodies like the Security Council from a full consideration of mechanisms to deter abuses, like sanctions. Evaluations of the MRM system have suggested that a population-based sampling methodology is necessary to generate such data.[44] These studies also clearly demonstrated that local organizations and institutions had a unique capacity to monitor abuses and were often the best sources of information. This is due to a variety of reasons, including their relationships with communities which enabled them to be clued into the security situation in the most remote and dangerous parts of the country (restricted to international actors), and the fact that they use local staff who are more trusted and victims feel more comfortable providing them information. Local staff also have a personal stake in monitoring abuses.

One key takeaway is that, despite the field of development's increasing focus over the last decade on "civil society strengthening," this research supports other findings that the international system often overlooks local actors.[45] There is a clear need for more empowerment of local actors and better coordination and pathways between local actors and international mechanisms. Implied is the need to support these local actors, which requires a concerted commitment on the part of the international community. Conflict zones are rife with examples of local civil society organizations and individuals who risk their lives to document human rights abuses and face a particular set of challenges. In 2016, the U.S. Department of State funded a comprehensive program, *The Human Rights Documentation Toolkit*, to assist grassroots documenters and organizations address the concerns they articulated were priorities. The project team, led by the Public International Law and Policy Group (PILPG), collected survey data from 55 organizations across 42 countries related to their self-reported challenges in documenting abuses.[46] The most frequent responses included: security for those providing statements; lack of physical and/or monetary resources; security for individuals collecting information; security of the informational itself; and lack of human resources.[47] The program created a digital library and web platform, which is a compilation of 138 resources shared by organizations who have been working on these issues for many years. For example, Amnesty International has produced a Citizen Evidence Lab, which helps provide verification tools to local documenters (and is linked to the *Human Rights Documentation Toolkit*). Amnesty and other groups have shared a number of publications related to monitoring and investigating specific crimes, and the *Human Rights Documentation Toolkit* is linked to a network of experts to assist documenters with these issues. The organizations on the front lines of this work must be recognized and better supported to address these challenges, and the linkages between their work at the community level and national and international mechanisms to provide education and uphold human rights standards strengthened.

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44 See: *OIOS comprehensive assessment of the United Nations system response to children affected by armed conflict,* Report to the Secretary-General (2003).

45 See for example, Autesserre, S (2014). *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention,* Cambridge University Press; and, www.fundingtj.org, which established the fact that little international funding has gone towards civil society organizations working on transitional justice issues in post-conflict settings. This is also well-documented in works such as *Peaceland*.

46 See: http://www.hrdtoolkit.org/. Of these organizations, more than 1/3 focused on the documentation of abuses of children's rights.

47 http://www.hrdtoolkit.org/survey-results/

OTHER CHALLENGES WITH THE REPORTING OF VIOLATIONS

In addition to the accuracy of the data collected by the MRM, there are other challenges related to these processes, some of which are common across accountability mechanisms for gross human rights violations. These include: the protection of witnesses and victims; creating and implementing risk mitigation and due diligence policies; and establishing appropriate standards of proof and quality control. As exemplified by the Human Rights Documentation Toolkit above, the field of human rights documentation has progressed significantly with regard to these issues, and there are many resources; the degree to which the human rights and child rights and protection communities collaborate to share them is unclear.

As the Columbia study indicates, the data collected from the MRM may be underutilized, especially at the local level, to actually inform programming, responses from appropriate authorities, and advocacy. Similarly, like much of the international system, the MRM is fundamentally reactive and not proactive. Experiences from countries that have had a full "MRM cycle," such as Nepal, underscore that the MRM process was important, but there must also be national mechanisms to provide adequate justice and reparation for children victims of the conflict.[48] In general, there must be strengthened linkages between the monitoring and reporting of violations and other transitional justice processes.

Finally, the MRM data feeds into the Annual Report of the Secretary General. However, despite credible information revealing ongoing violations, in recent years civil society organizations and the media have highlighted the degree to which some Member States have exercised inappropriate pressures to avoid being named in the "list of shame," including threats to withdraw funds. Two particularly high-profile cases include the US Government's pressure to exclude the Israeli Defense Forces from being listed in 2015 despite a recommendation from then-SRSG Leila Zerrougui. In 2016, the Saudi Arabian Government pressured then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to remove the Saudi-led coalition from the list despite evidence of grave violations including killing and maiming and attacks against schools and hospitals in Yemen.[49] Other cases that have not received as much media coverage but where geopolitics likely affected the listing of parties include armed groups in Pakistan, Thailand, and India. In June of 2017, 41 civil society organizations working on issues related to children and armed conflict sent a letter to Secretary General António Guterres urging him to reconsider his reported decision to "freeze" new additions of parties to conflict to the 2017 UN Security Council report. The letter argues that – in the face of these recent politicized decisions – it is crucial that the 2017 report contains an accurate and credible list of perpetrators, stating: "The evidence of grave violations against children continues to be overwhelming, and in some countries, is only growing. In the face of widespread impunity, now is not the time to 'freeze' new additions to the list, but to ensure that it includes all perpetrators, with no exceptions. To do otherwise would undermine . . . efforts to achieve accountability."[50]

Politics surrounding children and armed conflict is not unique to the United Nations. The June release of the United States' own annual 2017 list, mandated by the U.S. Congress through the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008, created controversy.[51] In an unusual decision, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson reportedly overruled the recommendations of State Department officials and removed Burma and Iraq from the list. Human rights groups immediately responded, noting that the list is both an important "naming and shaming" tool and also useful because it carries prohibitions against foreign assistance, including certain forms of bi-lateral military aid. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) were critical of the Obama administration for providing too many waivers. However, they also note that the list has made a real difference when it led to the withholding of assistance to governments such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, and Rwanda, which then made progress in ending the use of child soldiers. HRW's Jo Becker states, "[Tillerson's] decision flies in the face of evidence that both governments are still complicit in child soldier use and undermines US leverage to influence change. The US provides Iraq with billions of dollars of military assistance each year; in exchange, it should insist the government put an end to child recruitment by its units...." Becker compels

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48 http://watchlist.org/wp-content/uploads/PPCC-Nepal-MRM-Study-FINAL-16p.pdf

49 Watchlist 2017; https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/5010-hrw-asks-un-to-put-israel-on-child-rights-violators-listl

50 http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/2017-06/children-and-armed-conflict-open-letter-un-secretary-general-ant%C3%B3nio-guterres

51 https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2017/271111.htm

the U.S. Congress to "ask tough questions about the State Department's listing process. It's one thing to assert that governments using child soldiers still require military aid, but it's another to pretend the problem doesn't even exist."[52] Many concerns surround the Trump Administration's commitment to human rights; these types of decisions will mean that civil society organizations need to maintain their vigilance in holding international and national actors responsible to their commitments. This work will also require resources, including the support of the private philanthropic community.

THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT AND OTHER CRIMINAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

The Rome Statute and the International Criminal Court (ICC) situated child soldiers and rape within broader human rights violations linked to a prosecution mechanism. In a landmark case, the Special Court for Sierra Leone convicted Charles Taylor for aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity, which included his utilization of child soldiers. Again, has this conviction served to deter violations of rights? There is tentative evidence to suggest that it has.

Questions related to whether or not the ICC and other international courts have been useful are rife within international affairs and international human rights law. The short answer is that there needs to be a more robust empirical basis for any claims about the deterrent effects of these mechanisms. However, while broad claims about the ICC's potential to deter all actors from committing human rights abuses are likely unfounded, there is relatively strong support for a conditional deterrence effect, which takes into account the type of actor, type of conflict, and type of intervention.

In *The Justice Cascade*, Sikkink argues that there has been an evolution in responsibility for human rights abuses over time from a model when immunity was commonplace for state officials to the notion of state accountability. Now there is a further shift to the idea of individual criminal responsibility, a principle first established with the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY), which then became a model for the ICC and later international criminal tribunals. While these are

themselves important shifts, another central finding of Sikkink's work is that a combination of transitional justice mechanisms, such as prosecutions and truth commissions, is more effective in promoting peaceful transitions than one mechanism alone.[53]

A Stanford Law School brief found that arguments for the deterrence effect of the ICC (and presumably other international justice mechanisms) relates to two main relationships: "Ratification of the ICC seems to exert a positive effect on domestic laws and practices and is correlated with a reduction in hostilities and human rights violations; and the ICC exerts a normative influence by making prosecutions for human rights violations a primary mechanism for justice, which is associated with improvements in the protection of human rights."[54] A central argument against criminal accountability processes is the hypothesis that the threat of prosecution may thwart peace processes, prolonging conflict and incurring more civilian casualties.

In perhaps the largest scale empirical study of the ICC's deterrence effect, Jo and Simmons note several key findings:

1. governments which depend on international assistance are more easily deterred by the threat of the ICC;

2. legitimate governments are more easily deterred than rebels; however, even rebels' rate of killing civilians is reduced once the ICC has signaled that it will try to prosecute;

3. the type of rebel is significant – secessionist rebels who seek international legitimacy and a path to their own government are more likely to fear the threat of the ICC; and finally

4. the deterrence effect may only come into play for Individuals and particularly rebel groups once the ICC has taken actual steps towards opening an investigation.[55]

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52 https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/27/us-state-departments-lie-about-child-soldiers

53 This work has been critiqued because Sikkink does not look at a range of other processes, including memorialization, institutional reform, atrocity and citizenship education, etc, *Sikkink, K. (2012). The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions Are Changing World Politics*, New York: W.W. Norton.

54 https://law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Philips-The-International-Criminal-Court-and-Deterrence-A-Report-to-the-U.S.-Department-of-State.pdf

55 Hyeran, J. & Simmons, B. Can the International Criminal Court Deter Atrocity? (December 2014) Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=2552820

It is worth noting that Jo and Simmons' data set ends in 2011 – before the ICC had convicted anyone – timing which may impact these findings. Second, there may be significant selection biases given the fact that states *choose* to ratify the Rome Statute – the factors that led to this decision in the first place may also inform various attitudes and behaviors towards peace and justice rather than any deterrence effect.

A scan of the literature and several inquiries did not reveal any specific empirical work examining mechanisms that deter the violation of children's rights, per se, or the Taylor trial specifically – an important note given recent suggestions to start a separate international court to try violations against children (see below). However, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) has noted the importance of recognizing children and youth as a separate category of victim, particularly given that children are frequently among the most affected by conflict. The Children and Youth Team at ICTJ argues that assessing the impact of violations on children should be included early on in the mandate of transitional justice processes to inform these processes' nature and function. This team has also conducted research and put forward guidance on appropriate ways to engage children and youth in transitional justice processes.[56]

These regulatory regimes represent a great step forward; however, the fact that a brutal war in Syria is persisting into its sixth year is just one indication that there are also major problems with these mechanisms in their application. Some of the issues mentioned previously, such as witness protection, are significant obstacles to getting reliable information into these systems. Given that these processes take years, the probability of a conviction through an international criminal tribunal may be so low that it mitigates a robust deterrent function. Further, as evidenced by Omar al-Bashir's outstanding ICC warrant for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed in Darfur, this system is flaunted in ways that are debilitating.

It is also important to keep in mind that the empirical study of transitional justice processes is almost exclusively focused on criminal accountability and truth commissions though these are not the only – or at times, not even the most appropriate – means of serving justice to victims of gross human rights abuses. International tribunals are inordinately expensive processes (as of 2016, the ICTY employed more than 400 people and cost the international community more than $2 billion[57]), that are usually focused on a small number of high-level individuals with "command responsibility." The Joinet Principles establish that victims in conflict have fundamental rights to truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence.[58] It is important to take a balanced approach to all of these rights as well as generate an understanding of how to engage children in each of these processes. Additionally, those in war-affected communities may not see a far-off Western mechanism as central to their needs, and there is a dearth of research about other justice processes that may be better suited to rebuilding relationships in post-conflict communities, particularly regarding children and youth (e.g., peace education, storytelling, psychosocial recovery). Published in 2016, one of the few empirical studies of community-level truth and reconciliation programming in Sierra Leone found that these processes increased forgiveness of perpetrators and improved social cohesion and other positive community-level outcomes, such as social networks and resources. Yet, they left participants more depressed, anxious, and with increased symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.[59] There is a need to better understanding these processes, including their benefits and consequences for communities, individuals, children, and youth, and relationship to macro-level societal outcomes like deterrence of future violations. The tremendous focus of the international community on criminal accountability to the detriment of other processes such as this has been documented in recent work.[60] A reliance on criminal tribunals may divert resources needed by victims and communities to heal and to engage in other transitional justice processes and the type of society-wide reconciliation and education that may be more essential for post-conflict peace and the prevention of future rights violations. Given that children and youth tend to be conflict's largest category of victim and that work across sectors has demonstrated that education has a protective effective against youth joining violent or extremist movements, exploring the ways in which these processes affect children and youth and how they can positively contribute to transitional justice efforts is an area for further work. Before concluding this section,

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56   See: https://www.ictj.org/publication/engaging-children-and-youth-transitional-justice-processes-guidance-outreach-programs

57   http://www.icty.org/en/about/tribunal/the-cost-of-justice

58   http://archivesproject.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/archivesproject/Publications/DwP_Conceptual_Framework_October2012.pdf

59   Cilliers, J. Dube, O. & Siddiqi, B. (May 2016). Reconciling After Civil Conflict Increases Social Capital but Decreases Individual Wellbeing. Science, 352(6287).

60   See: www.fundingtj.org (2015)

we turn to the issue of armed non-state actors, a particularly challenging problem with international regulatory regimes, and explore whether there is any way to hold non-state actors accountable for violations of children's rights.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT ARMED NON-STATE ACTORS?

Armed non-state actors (ANSA) are a ubiquitous feature of today's conflicts from Bosnia and Kosovo to Somalia, Haiti, Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and of course, Syria and Iraq. The issue of ANSA – who are more likely to target civilians and engage in non-traditional methods of warfare such as terrorism – is among the thorniest problems facing the global community today. The ICRC notes that today's conflicts tend to be viewed by States and civil society in a much more conscious way through the lens of international law – primarily international humanitarian law (IHL), international human rights law, and refugee law. However, "there is a stark reality of protracted and proliferating conflicts, where the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law are commonly flouted and violations and abuses against children are widespread. Lack of respect for the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, the targeting of schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian assistance are evidenced by the rise in cases of killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals in numerous situations of conflict." [61] Can non-state actors in a civil war context who abuse human rights ever be subject to global regulatory conventions?

The answer seems to be sometimes. A key takeaway from the literature and discussions with experts on the protection of civilians in conflict is that non-state actors vary in their receptiveness to acting according to IHL. While the horrific abuses of those groups which often intentionally target civilians – frequently women and children – remain in the headlines, there are a range of tactics to engage ANSA. As one expert noted, "You can't generalize the concept of a non-state armed group and their willingness and/or ability to abide by the principles behind any international convention binding states. Burmese groups, Syrian groups, all have shown an interest and in many cases practical commitments to the Geneva Conventions and other IHL treaties." [62]

Hofmann and Schnekener define non-state armed groups as distinctive organizations that are willing and capable of using violence for pursuing their objectives and not integrated into formalized state institutions (e.g., regular armies, presidential guards, police, or special forces). [63] International conflict experts note that there are several main approaches to dealing with ANSAs in the broader context of conflict, from coercion (e.g., coercive diplomacy or the use of force or rule of law such as the ICC) to control and containment (e.g., reducing their freedom to maneuver and communicate) to marginalization and isolation of their worldviews. Institutionalist approaches are processes of bargaining aimed at the establishment of procedures, rules, and institutional settings that acknowledge the preferences and interests of all conflict parties and allow for some kind of peaceful co-existence (conflict management). Examples are ceasefires, confidence-building measures, and peace agreements as well as mechanisms for conflict settlement and arbitration. The protection of civilians and children can be central to these negotiations. Constructivist approaches focus on persuading "armed actors to accept, respect, and eventually internalize norms, thereby fostering long-term transformation processes that involve not only conformity of behavior for tactical reasons but also a genuine and sustainable change of the actors' policies and self-conception." [64] Armed actors with clear political ambitions who have to address long-term expectations of their constituencies and develop an interest in improving their local as well as international image may be more receptive to this type of engagement. [65] This receptiveness is central to the approach of some NGOs such as Geneva Call and the Humanitarian Dialogue Center in Geneva.

There are civil society organizations, such as Geneva Call, whose sole focus is convincing armed groups to commit themselves to treaties and compacts, including those that respect children. One example is the *Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict.*[66] Given that ANSAs cannot be parties to international treaties, the *Deed of Commitment* provides them a means to express their intention to respect a clear set of norms that abide by international law. Geneva Call

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61   ICRC, 2016.

62   Interview, June 2017. Washington, D.C.

63   https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/review/2011/irrc-883-schneckener.pdf

64   Ibid, p. 19

65   ICRC 2016

66   *Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict.* https://armedgroups-internationallaw.org/2012/08/07/two-armed-non-state-actors-from-burma-myanmar-sign-geneva-calls-deed-of-commitment-for-the-protection-of-children-from-the-effects-of-armed-conflict/

notes that 19 ANSAs have signed the *Deed* to-date, and they are in negotiation with 20 more.[67] These NGOs often have a strong capacity to influence public opinion, to educate and raise awareness about child protection issues, to lobby political decision-makers, and to engage with diplomatically unacknowledged actors, such as ANSAs, without implying a political shift in their favor. Additionally, their frequent long-term engagement in a region means that they can garner trust, even from armed non-state actors. NGOs can be in the unique positon of being able to focus on specific issues without signaling broader political shifts, and this flexibility has been utilized to the advantage of child protection concerns; Geneva Call and the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers have both advocated for protection of children's rights and approach non-state actors with the intention of providing them a means for acknowledging their intention to respect international norms.

These are challenging situations, but experts in this arena note that scholars and practitioners should focus on understanding each set of tools and tactics and developing a strategy where different actors and processes – e.g., institutional approaches (sanctions, formal peace talks, etc.) and NGOs who engage with a wider range of actors than governments and provide platforms, training, and technical assistance – can work in parallel and leverage each other's strengths. Armed groups exhibit a spectrum of behavior in relation to their willingness to abide by IHL. While egregious violators such as Boko Haram and ISIL garner the most media attention, they may not be reflective of the norm across armed conflicts, and it would be erroneous to assume that there is no way to engage ANSAs in the protection of children.

The related issue of preventing recruitment of youth into armed and extremist groups (e.g., countering and preventing violent extremism [C/PVE]) has been a pervasive topic of research, programming, and policy over the last several years as groups such as Boko Haram and ISIL have expanded their reach. A recent United Nations Development Report, *Journey to Extremism in Africa,* examines the drivers, incentives, and "tipping points" for recruitment into extremist groups, noting that 33,300 fatalities in Africa are attributed to extremism from 2011 – 2016. This phenomenon is perpetuating fragility in already vulnerable countries and threatening positive development gains. While the study does not particularly focus on children and youth as a sample, many of the findings relate directly to: the importance of early childhood experiences; the role of parents, communities, and education; access to economic opportunity; and the critical nature of rights-based approaches to security and governance. Key takeaways include the fact that – similar to the failure of "mano dura" approaches to Central American gang violence a decade ago – harsh and insensitive tactics by security forces and lack of rule of law and state accountability in perpetuating human rights abuses as a response to extremism are critical "tipping points" for pushing people into extremist groups. Extremism thrives in areas where service delivery and governance are poor: "improved public policy and delivery of good governance…will ultimately represent a far more effective source of counter-terrorism and PVE than continued overconcentration of security-focused interventions."[68] Regarding education, the report notes that providing education for all is an essential task, together with social protection interventions that help children attend school regularly. At home, the one critical factor that explained feelings of unhappiness in childhood correlated with future extremism is the lack of parents' engagement in children's lives. This lack of engagement was exacerbated by lack of civil opportunity and education. In fact, higher-than-average years of religious schooling emerged as a source of resilience.

These findings all speak to the ongoing need for basic tenets of conflict-sensitive development and an overlapping set of policies and programs that bolster resilience to violence: focusing on early childhood experience, such as educating parents; improved delivery of education and basic social services; amplifying the messages of and supporting religious leaders who speak to tolerance, co-existence, and dialogue and who challenge misinterpretations of faith and Islam; supporting initiatives that help youth build positive social, cultural, and national identities; providing livelihood and technical training opportunities based on learning from successful DDR programs where youth have viable alternate paths than violence; and learning from other violence-prevention policies that have relied on incarceration and strong-arm tactics which have backfired and ended up strengthening violent and criminal networks.

EFFICACY OF THESE MECHANISMS AND OTHER GLOBAL TRENDS

The UN has 11 Security Council Resolutions pertaining to children. As one expert noted: "We have all the international

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67   See: https://genevacall.org/what-we-do/child-protection/

68   *Journey to Extremism in Africa*, p. 7

instruments, Paris commitments, optional commitments, regional commitments, national law – the standards on preventing and ending the recruitment of children are even more stringent! We are not devoid of global norms."[69] Despite all of these normative frameworks and regulatory regimes, recruitment of children and violations of their rights continue. These norms are imperfect as is their implementation. Yet it would be unfair to conclude that no progress has been made. As Radhika Coomaraswamy, the second SRSG affirmed, "In the 1990s no one thought twice about recruiting child soldiers. Now, everywhere in the world, there is real awareness that using child soldiers is wrong and that there should be accountability."[70]

In April of this year, Gordon Brown, UN Special Envoy for Global Education, announced that he will lead a new inquiry on protecting children in conflict which will specifically focus on holding perpetrators accountable. In fact, he has suggested the formation of a new international court just for the trial of grave violations of children.[71] This process will hopefully explore some of the gaps related to how children and youth perceive transitional justice processes and the relationship between these mechanisms and deterrence of the violation of their rights – and again, there must be caution about a focus solely on perpetrators. Hopefully, this report will also examine other processes – such as peace education and memorialization – that may better serve the justice needs of children. Further, in December 2015 the UN passed SCR 2250, focused on the role of youth (ages 15 – 29) in peacebuilding. This is a promising new normative development that provides a framework to elaborate on the ways in which adolescents and youth can be actively engage in decision-making related to peace and the prevention of conflict in their societies.[72]

The "securitization" of international development – including human rights assistance – in the post-9/11 world and the fight against global terrorism has at times run contrary the rights of children, constantly keeping the focus on security versus on how to effectively build up the resilience of communities in fragile and conflict-affected settings. In addition to the challenges raised above with CVE/PVE, these narratives have mushroomed and dwarfed most other efforts, such as Ambassador Samantha Power's attempt to drive an atrocity prevention agenda within the US government under the Obama administration. These paradigms raise concerns about how to avoid perpetually framing older children and adolescents through these lenses. Again, the question remains how to create synergies between the child protection community and these other lines of effort and trends; UNSC 2250 is potentially an important resource in driving this discussion as is further research on adolescent wellbeing and additional programming resources (discussed below).

QUESTIONS FROM THIS SECTION

■ How can there be better monitoring and reporting of violation of children's rights at the normative level that captures the prevalence of these acts? Is there a way to actually spur improve to the MRM process? Given the inherently political nature of the UN Security Council, is there any way to make the MRM the tool that it was set out to be? How can these efforts be made a priority and better linked to referral mechanisms?

■ Local actors, including organizations that build positive identities, engage children and youth in civic opportunities, and monitor and document human rights issues, play a crucial role in these efforts – how can they be better supported and their work brought more to the fore?

■ A vast amount of research is needed to better understand what deters human rights violations, particularly with regard to children's rights and particularly focused on types of interventions and processes outside of criminal tribunals.

■ Engagement with ANSAs – What are lessons learned from different forms of engagement, including civil society? What actually works in deterring ANSAs from targeting children? As the evidence base builds on what deters forced or voluntary recruitment, how can these findings be addressed and in a coordinated manner?

■ How can competing narratives of security/counter-terrorism paradigms versus resilience/positive engagement of youth be rectified and the latter promoted versus a knee-jerk reaction to the former?

■ How should the significant need to develop the adolescent/youth agenda be approached strategically?

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69   Interview, June 2017, Washington, D.C.
70   UNICEF 2016.
71   This report should be finished by December 2017:
     http://gordonandsarahbrown.com/2017/04/gordon-brown-to-chair-inquiry-on-protecting-children-in-conflict-2/
72   https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm

4. PROGRAMMING RESPONSES

Important shifts and new ideas are being generated in response to a growing evidence base on the impacts of war on children and youth. These include: the movement away from a developmental pathological approach to the idea of psychosocial wellbeing and the adoption of a resilience versus deficit model; new research indicating that repeated deprivation and structural violence may cause as high if not higher levels of distress than witnessing direct violence; the definitive importance of early childhood development (ECD) for crucial lifelong outcomes; the growing popularity of "systems thinking"; and the gap around adolescents and need to focus on a lifespan approach. Can we design and support better programs for war-affected children and youth? This section addresses these developments, taking up the evolution of key programming approaches such as child-friendly spaces and the situation of girls in conflict.

KEY TRENDS

Over the last decade, there has been shift from focusing on "mental health disorders" and developmental pathology to "psychosocial wellbeing," which is conceived of as a dynamic relationship that exists between psychological and social processes. First, the previous narrow focus on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) doesn't speak to a well-established literature demonstrating that psychological response to war are not limited to PTSD but rather vary and are mitigated by a child's developmental level. Second, there has been a significant shift away from a "deficit" approach to mental health in war, traditionally focused on the ways exposure to violence leads to symptoms of "trauma" or other pathological outcomes, to a "resilience" approach. Though it may seem illogical, a growing body of literature suggests that most children are resilient, even under extremely adverse conditions.[73] There are important exceptions to this work that must be better understood, such as findings from studies of chronic political conflict in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, which indicate

that there is not a significant part of the population who live free of symptoms of war-related distress.[74] However, in general there is a shift to better understanding the nature of resilience, which is understood not as an innate individual characteristic but rather as a relational process.

Resilience research indicates that sociocultural processes such as ideological commitment and religious beliefs can promote better mental health and that it is important to strengthen protective processes within key relationships, including families, households, and communities. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines, which have been the standard for addressing mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies since their publication in 2007, operationalize a social-ecological approach and should be the basis for intervention.[75] Researchers also note that resilience interventions must be developed with particular sensitivity to context, emphasizing the necessity of a Do No Harm approach; they caution against promoting traditional practice that reinforce stigma and stress the importance of promoting community-based, culturally grounded, and carefully evaluated approaches.

The risks pertaining to war exposure are complex and interrelated and cannot be minimized. However, there is also growing evidence indicating that structural adversity generates moderate to severe levels of psychosocial distress. We have historically understood the effects of war on children through the lens of trauma resulting from exposure to direct violence. Yet the greater risk to children may come from repeated deprivation and the everyday stresses related to structural violence (e.g., poverty, discrimination, destruction of social identity, unsafe housing, exposure to types of violence including within the family, social isolation, and lack of stable employment opportunities).[76]

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73 See: Fernando, C. & Ferrari, M. (2013). *Handbook of Resilience in Children of War,* Springer: New York; and, two Special Issues of *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology on children and armed conflict*, 2016, Volume 22 (3) and 2017 Volume 223 (1).

74 Hobfoll, S., Mancini, A., Hall, B., Canetti, D., Bonanno, G. (2011). The Limits of Resilience: Distress Following Chronic Political Violence Among Palistinians, *Social Science Medicine,* Apr 72(8): 1400-1408.

75 IASC (2007). Guideline on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies: http://cpwg.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2011/09/Guidelines_IASC_Mental_Health_Psychosocial_with_index.jpg.

76 Kostleny, K. (2106). Structural Violence and the Everyday Stresses of Internally Displaced Children in Somaliland and Puntland *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 22 (3), 226–235.

Boyden and Mann demonstrate that refugee children see social exclusion and lack of hope as their greatest problems, greater in some ways than the physical danger they have escaped from. These are social problems that affect their parents as well as the children.[77] Regardless of which harms cause the most anguish, there is widespread agreement among experts that political violence and conflict require an intervention approach that both reduces risk factors and strengthens protective factors that support children's psychosocial wellbeing.

While this body of literature is developing, there is still a need for a greater understanding of factors that promote resilience in children of war. Fernando and Ferrari notes, "Research must involve more than the study of individual attributes shaping worse-than- or better-than-expected health outcomes; rather, it must contextualize and develop mental and social trajectories, and identify critical changes to social, educational, and material environments that can shift individual trajectories towards more favorable health outcomes despite the severe difficulties many civilians experience during wartime."[78]

IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

It is well-established that failure to address adversity in early childhood leads to lifelong deficiencies. The return on investment for developmental support and human capital growth is exponentially greater before age five. The U.S. National Action Plan on Children in Adversity states, "Major advances in neuroscience, molecular biology, genomics, psychology, and other fields now help us to understand better how significant adversity early in life gets into the body and has lifelong, damaging effects on learning and behavior and both physical and mental health. Chronic or excessive activation of the body's stress response systems, in the absence of the buffering protection of responsive human relationships, is known as 'toxic stress.'"[79] We know that the impact of toxic stress on early brain development is no less harmful than other widely acknowledged damaging effects, such as poor nutrition. Toxic stress can lead to harmful psychological processes and interpersonal relationships, violent behavior, inadequate learning, and

decreased economic productivity amongst individuals. At the level of society, risks include: exacerbated inequality; increased crime rates; intergenerational cycles of violence and poverty; reduced gross national income; higher rates of unemployment; and decreased social cohesion and trust. Research has indicated that interventions in the first two to three years of life are essential factors in mitigating the harmful effects of toxic stress. The Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC) notes that the benefits of ECD programming and services include increased social cohesion, equality, and economic productivity. Further, this type of programing can be utilized to engage conflicting sociocultural, ethnic, or religious identity groups, and government implementation of such services can increase trust and build relationship between citizens, communities, and institutions.[80]

ECD programming is important, yet this type of programming should be considered within the context of a life-span approach; creating another "humanitarian silo" which focuses only on early childhood development may have a detrimental effect on broader child protection outcomes.

SYSTEMS THINKING

Systems thinking, popular in the social sciences and increasingly in certain fields of humanitarian assistance and international development, assumes that a system is comprised of an intricate web of interactive and interdependent elements and examines the linkages between them. Attempts to influence and improve some aspects of the system inexorably produce ripples of reactions in other parts and levels. The social ecological model and the IASC pyramid are both examples of types of systems thinking. In a 2016 Child Frontiers paper for the Child Protection Working Group's Systems Strengthening and Disaster Risk Reduction Task Force, the authors note that systems thinking provides a more holistic way of analyzing the challenges children are facing, bringing together a range of issues as well as an examination of root causes and enabling a more nuanced solution. Child protection systems are unique to each setting at a particular moment in time, are adaptive, and may change in response to other issues in the environment; therefore, they require a nuanced and evolving understanding of the context. Child protection work tends to focus on short-term approaches,

77 Boyden, J. & Mann, G. (2005). Children's Risk, Resilience and Coping in Extreme Situations. In M. Ungar (Ed.), *Handbook for Working with Children and Youth*, Sage, 9 – 32.

78 Ferrari & Chianti, p. 290.

79 U.S National Action Plan on Children in Adversity, 2012.

80 *Contributions of Early Childhood Services to Preventing Violent Conflict and Sustaining Peace, Early Childhood Peace Consortium,* Retrieved: http://s3.amazonaws.com/inee-assets/resources/ECPC_Brief-v8_WEB.pdf

which are often reactive and not prevention-focused; there is also a tendency to establish parallel systems which can be inaccessible to national actors as well as to focus narrowly on institutions, the State, or community-based actors without linking them. Thinking through a systems framework can help address these issues. There have been advancements in applying a systems approach to child protection work, including the fact that humanitarian professionals ask more questions about the impact of their work on systems, are more aware of the consequences, increasingly use systems language, and seek stronger and more sustainable outcomes. However, research has found that complex emergencies are particularly ill-adapted to systems strengthening processes. In a 2015 study in South Sudan, Canavera and colleagues found that four dimensions were crucial pillars of child protection systems strengthening: coordination, capacity, funding, and community inclusion. However, the degree to which these processes were institutionalized varied greatly, and the "humanitarian apparatus" – focused on short-term funding cycles and accountability to international actors – operated separately from the lived experience and needs of children, families and communities. The authors note: "If the objective is to strengthen national child protection systems, emergency response activities must better align with household and community-level efforts to protect children."[81] Systems thinking applied to the child protection sphere is in its early stages, and continued elaboration of training methodologies, programmatic approaches, and impact analysis is needed.[82]

OLDER CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

In general, the experience of older children, adolescents, and young adults (spanning ages 10 – 24) should be a critical focus for research and intervention. As one expert commented, "We are in need of disruption of all kinds in our assumptions about youth. Adults, including donors, don't see youth as effective actors in peace and security and don't think of youth issues as important.

This is a tremendous missed opportunity, in part because the field of children and conflict is well defined [after decades of research] – but the youth field is not. We have, thankfully, moved on from just talking about Countering Violent Extremism and now at least we are talking about transforming violence and promoting and sustaining peace. We need to disrupt these ideas that this huge population is a threat but rather focus on understanding their potentially massive ability to contribute to peace and security."[83] In a paper on the effects of adversity on adolescence, Fischer and colleagues point to the "triple dividend" that investment in this age range can reap, noting that adverse impacts in adolescence affect that individual in the moment, affect outcomes over the lifespan, and affect the next generation.[84]

The brain continues to develop throughout childhood into young adulthood; new scientific research demonstrates that there are actually two critical periods of increased plasticity in this process, one in early childhood and another in adolescence, which is attributed to "heightened sensitivity to social surroundings."[85] Teenagers are the subject of endless volumes of research, speculation, and at-times angst in high-income countries, yet there is a dearth of work on the experience of adolescents in low-income countries. This gap is particularly problematic given the fact that the number of youth and adolescents in the world are at an all-time high, and close to 90% live in contexts prone to instability.

As with most literature on adversity, the body of knowledge on adolescent development tends to focus on threats versus deprivation though they likely co-occur. Research shows that this age period exists around the world when youth are gaining competencies and beginning to fulfill roles and expectations although the duration may vary across cultures. These transitional milestones require societies to exhibit a minimum level of stability and function though the degree to which people living in adversity go to lengths to create these rituals is notable – for example, a somewhat surreal recent video depicting a "mass wedding" of 30 couples in war-torn Aleppo.[86]

81 Canavera, M., Lanning, K., Polin, K. & Stark, L. (2016). 'And then they left': Challenges to child protection systems strengthening in South Sudan. *Children & Society*, 30: 356–368.

82 *Adapting to Learn, Learning to Adapt: Overview of and considerations for child protection systems strengthening in emergencies.* July 2016. Child Frontiers on behalf of the Systems Strengthening and Disaster Risk Reduction Task Force.

83 Interview, June 2017, Washington, D.C.

84 Fischer, H., Boothby, N., & Wessells, M. (2107). The Effects of Extreme Adversity on Adolescent Experience, unpublished manuscript, Columbia University.

85 Ibid.

86 http://www.euronews.com/2017/05/13/30-couples-celebrate-simultaneous-wedding-in-aleppo;

The impact of the disruption of these transition milestones is largely unknown though likely varies according to the individual and the context. Fischer and colleagues propose a framework with four elements to better understand adolescent responses to conflict:

1. **Nature of adversity** (threat and deprivation; severity, including proximity, level of exposure and accumulated risks; chronicity);

2. **Person** (gender; cognitive capacity; exposure to early childhood adversity; attribution of meaning and causality);

3. **Process** (critical relationships between adolescents, family, and community); and

4. **Context** (violence; chronic adversity; disruption to family systems; social networks, status, and hierarchies; education; access to livelihoods).[87]

In conflict and humanitarian emergencies adolescents may be required to assume a complex and contradictory set of roles, ranging from vulnerable and dependent to wily and adroit. Humanitarian actors may impose the former while survival in new environments, such as refugee camps or unknown cities, may require the latter. There is also evidence indicating that particular aspects of the above constellation that merit increased focus are disruptions in education, employment, and aspirations – all of which may make youth more likely to join armed groups or be attracted to fundamentalist ideologies. Livelihoods and the disruption in family economic status that is part and parcel of war may, in particular, warrant increased illumination. Fisher and colleagues note that additional areas for future research include: adolescent responses to adversity in low-income settings; scholarship that takes a multi-disciplinary approach; better understanding of cultural conceptions of adolescence; more focus on positive adaption, resilience, and agency versus a narrow emphasis on PTSD responses; better understanding social processes and key relationships; and improved applied tools and programs that foster social and emotional learning (SEL) at the levels of individual learning and overall psychosocial wellbeing while also differentiating appropriately between them.

In addition, the way in which older children, adolescents, and young adults can be mobilized as a force for conflict prevention and transformation remains a gap in the empirical literature although this may be changing. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) completed a series of impact evaluations looking at the safety, wellbeing, and agency of girls and adolescents in the DRC, Pakistan and Ethiopia. Further, the organization just prioritized adolescent development as a key piece of their work going forward. Peace and atrocity education programming is often focused on this demographic though sustained donor funding to programs that focus on citizen engagement, youth participation, and various approaches to education as a mechanism to promote democracy or human rights is needed. Some research even suggests these approaches are common – but these programs seem completely siloed from interventions in the humanitarian space on child and adolescent development.[88] There needs to be more coordination between, or even basic understanding of, these different lines of effort.

THE EVOLUTION OF INTERVENTION

A range of interventions and approaches have been widely utilized to support children in war, including: child-friendly spaces (CFS); community-based child protection mechanisms; community-based psychosocial supports; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes; family support; peacebuilding; psychological first aid; psychotherapy; and school-based supports. There can never be a "one-size-fits-all" approach to interventions with war-affected children, yet there is a large evidence base pointing to certain principles that should structure interventions. Wessells suggests that programs should be: multilevel, supporting several levels of children's social ecologies (household, neighborhood, school, community, and societal levels); resilience versus deficit-oriented; multidisciplinary; tailored to fit different subgroups; and cognizant of policy and funding concerns. He also makes the important point that shelters which enable privacy, the simple act of a parent hugging a child, or a teacher offering encouragement rarely make it into formal understandings of intervention, yet such examples can be incredibly important protective mechanisms.[89]

What, then, are effective programs in practice? Child-

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87   Fischer, H., et al.

88   Velez, G. (2017). Building Peace Through Postconflict Youth: An Exploratory Analysis of the Relationship between Human Rights and Citizenship for Peruvian Adolescents, *Peace and Conflict: The Journal of Peace Psychology,* 23(1), 93 – 93.

89   Kostelny, K. & Wessells, M. (2107). Interventions for Supporting War-affected Children, *Peace and Conflict: The Journal of Peace Psychology,* 23 (1) 4–13.

friendly spaces (CFS) are one of the most common interventions in war zones, in part thanks to UNICEF and INGOs' widespread utilization of the approach. These programs can be rapidly organized, are relatively low-cost, and can engage a large number and wide age-range of children. The objective of these programs generally includes a mixture of protection, psychosocial, and educational elements. Unfortunately, Kostelny and Wessels note that CFSs are often implemented in a "reflex-like manner," and while they are a flexible tool, they are not suited to every context. Other critiques point to the fact that CFSs are often inconsistently operationalized. As one expert noted, "Some toys in a room with a semi-alert adult do not make a CFS."[90] The lack of evidence base makes it difficult to have a real sense of how the methodology has been implemented and their efficacy although UNICEF and others have recently completed large evaluations of CFSs which have informed their capacity to measure, monitor, and evaluate these interventions. In response, some agencies will move away from short-term, crisis-driven approaches and look at more expansive interventions that focus more on building community resilience.

This approach has evolved to more comprehensive programming models. Last year, the IRC published the Safe Healing and Learning Spaces toolkit, which they contend includes modules that are entirely based on rigorous evidence and extensive guidelines on how, when, and where it is appropriate to set up the program. The components have taken into account the recent developments in research, including the importance of ECD, units on SEL, bolstering cognitive skills such as reading and math, and also a focus on parenting and life skills.[91]

There are other examples of successful social ecological approaches to programming in war zones. Ventevogel and colleagues provide a useful picture of how a social ecological approach and the IASC pyramid were applied in Afghanistan:

Layer 1 (*basic services and security*) was enhanced by building water wells to improve general psychosocial well-being of the Afghan population. Layer 2 (*community and family-level support*) was provided through Child Well-Being Committees that gave children a voice in decision-makin, or promoted physical education and play in schools and communities; the

Figure 1: The IASC pyramid as applied in Afghanistan
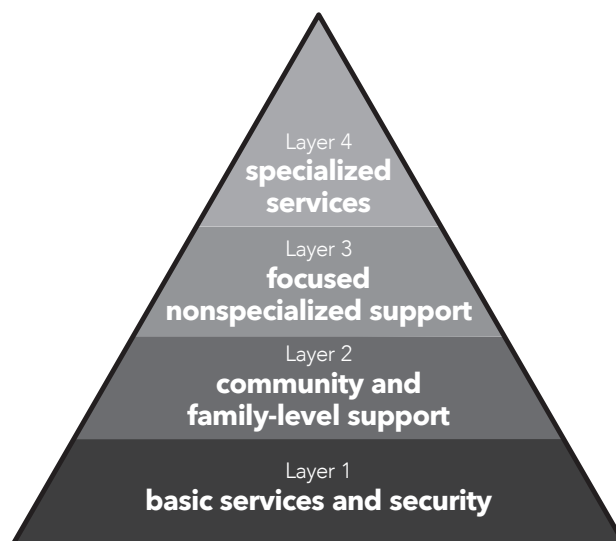
NGO War Child also implemented psychosocial activities in schools and in communities throughout Herat and Kabul with one component of this program aimed at getting working children back to school. Layer 3 (*focused nonspecialized support*) was provided by helping school teachers provide psychosocial support; more specifically, Save the Children USA and UNICEF attempted to integrate training on psychosocial support into the primary school teacher curriculum. Layer 4 (*specialized services*) still needed further development as Afghanistan is reported to lack specialized services for child psychiatry or child psychology.[92]

Findings from a recent evaluation of a UNICEF and ECHO-funded project in Ukraine which aimed to assist the Ministry of Education and Science to provide conflict-affected children and adolescents life skills and psychosocial support (PSS) showed promising results on all of the dimensions evaluated (relevance, outcomes, effectiveness, synergies, and sustainability). All interviewees were "overwhelmingly positive" on the coping skills that the program had provided to children and teachers and children's behavior and attitude changes. Student-teacher relationships and children's experience of the school environment showed significant improvement. In addition, positive changes occurred in the degree to which communities hosting IDPs accepted and welcomed

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90   Interview, June 2017, Washington, D.C.

91   http://shls.rescue.org/

92   Ventevogel, et al. In Fernando & Ferrari (Eds.) (2013).

them. A notable mark of success is that participants expressed desire to scale the program to all parts conflict-affected parts of Ukraine. The evaluators credited four particular factors for this success: the fact that the life skills education and PSS were implemented together enhanced their natural complementarity; the important role of school leaders and administrators; diligent planning and training by the implementing partners on the ground; and the fact that the program was based on solid evidence and proven models.[93]

Other research on psychosocial structured activities in schools has been mixed, and it would be worthwhile to understand what replicability (if any) could be applied from the resounding success in Ukraine.[94] More rigorous, independent research is needed to see if such programs can help regulate adolescent learning, support psychosocial wellbeing and socio-emotional learning, and improve academic outcomes.

A final important area of intervention is related to child soldiers and particularly the experiences of girls. Some argue that there has been too much focus placed on this particular issue, versus the wide array of effects of armed conflict on children's life. That may be so; however, the issue of child soldiers has been a central area of research and intervention within the international community for many years. The last decade has gone a long way to demonstrating that – rather than being "ticking time bombs," with the appropriate support – children who have been recruited by or "voluntarily" joined and served in armies and militia exhibit extraordinary resilience and can resume their lives in a productive manner.[95] The research on this topic is extensive and out of the scope of this paper to summarize. Worth noting is that there is renewed interest, with the aim of prevention, in understanding the underlying causes that prompt youth to join armed groups as well as links related to recruitment. Further avenues for research and programming include possible overlaps or linkages in motivations between armed military groups and other types of violence such as gang membership or joining a terrorist group which may center on exclusion

and a focus on adequate funding and support and funding for youth engagement, reintegration, and empowerment. The U.N. Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration is developing global guidance on social-economic reintegration which will be ready later this year.

One important aspect that continues to deserve specific attention is the experience of girls in conflict. Despite important work over the last two decades to better understand and socialize the particular challenges faced by girls in armed conflict, particularly with regard to sexual abuse and rape, there are still grave concerns to be addressed. This year marks the 17th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, known as the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. Zimerman notes that despite widespread rhetoric that accepts the WPS agenda, this continues to be the most underfunded and under-implemented of the Security Council agendas. This gap has profound implications for the lived experience of men and women, boys and girls because the WPS agenda is, at its heart, about power dynamics and not "just" women and girls: "When the focus is on women rather than power dynamics, WPS issues can be construed as peripheral, something to focus on once the "important" and "urgent" work is complete (which it never is). Policy discussions become preoccupied with aspects of the agenda that have to do with women's [and girl's] physical bodies, such as sexual violence, while overlooking aspects such as livelihood programs for female ex-combatants."[96]

In addition to the general need to take the implementation of the WPS agenda seriously to address root causes of violence, we also have information regarding the specific risks to girls. The December 2016 report of the SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict to the Human Rights Council notes that due to increased security concerns in conflict zones, even when schools are operating, girls' attendance decreases precipitously, causing out-of-school interruptions that can have long-term consequences. There is also increasing risk of forced marriage, which, as previously noted, is sometimes welcomed by families and girls themselves due to the perception that marriage can provide security and stability. The report notes that "forced marriage is another practice that has increasingly been used by armed groups as an expression of power and control over populations" and also results in girls leaving school. At times, to avoid these dangers, families assign girls

93 Talbot, C. & Wessells, M. (2017). End-of-Project Evaluation: ECHO Children of Peace Project, Life skills education and psychosocial support for conflict-affected children and adolescents in Ukraine.

94 See: Ager, A. et al. (2011). "The Impact of the School-Based Psychosocial Structured Activities (PSSA) Program on Conflict-Affected Children in Northern Uganda," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 52 (11), 1124–33, and, Alves, *INEE Background Paper: Psychosocial Support and Social and Emotional Learning for Children and Youth in Emergency Settings:* http://reliefweb.int/report/world/psychosocial-support-and-social-and-emotional-learning-children-and-youth-emergency

95 See: Wessells, M. (2009); Stark & Wessells (2013). Kohrt, et al. (2017).

96 https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/lessons-from-the-uns-women-peace-and-security-agenda/

more household responsibilities to keep them at home. Girls are also significantly affected by recruitment and use with some estimates indicating that as many as 40 per cent of children associated with armed forces or armed groups are female. Continued work is necessary to understand their specific experiences and appropriate responses.

QUESTIONS FROM THIS SECTION

- How can we prevent the continued fragmentation of humanitarian responses to children and vulnerable groups? Is it possible to effectively combine and integrate sector responses (ECD, protection, health, and nutrition), perhaps at the household level, to more effectively prevent harm and promote protection and wellbeing? Could such an approach create a "core response" for all children that crosses sectors, includes vulnerable groups (i.e., child soldiers, separated children, victims of SGBV and trafficking, etc.) and more adequately ensures that response efforts are not merely the continuation of linear programming efforts?

- Is our understanding of risk and protective factors too static and reduced to check-lists? What would a "wellbeing" or approach to children *across* the life-span in conflict zones look like? For older children and adolescents, how do we better promote personal transformation and resilience in adversity?

- How do we better understand the nature of the social context for children and youth in conflict and refugee settings? How do we support key relationships within those contexts?

- What is the experience of older children, adolescents, and young adults in conflict? How do we design interventions to support them? How can we engage them in peacebuilding and human rights efforts? How do we build an evidence base for these types of interventions and better link them to other areas, including humanitarian assistance and child and adolescent development?

- Are there ways to prevent the recruitment of children into armed groups? What motivates children to join armed groups?

- How do we better address the experience of girls in conflict and implement the WPS agenda as opposed to paying it lip service?

- How do we promote collective action that is driven by children, youth, and communities?

- What does a long-term investment in these processes entail, and how can that become a reality for donors?

GENERAL APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

As a final note, across humanitarian, human rights, and development actors, there is widespread frustration by the structures and inefficacy of current approaches to conflict. The funding "hamster wheel" (i.e., proposal, project, report, repeat) is not yielding results for billions of people. Four key themes emerged from the above discussion, including a need for: more children and youth-led research that feeds into the design of interventions; collective action models, likely based on systems and ecological thinking, and a better understanding of how this approach can effectively mobilize and support individuals, communities and institutions to address conflict-related challenges[97]; an improved understanding of the adolescent experience in war and relationship between youth, human rights, and peace; and the need to focus on key relationships, local-level processes, and supporting local actors. One important tool to ensure better coherence among all of these processes would be the development of a common set of indicators around preventing violence at a cumulative level and the collection of primary data to sustain this over the next 10 – 15 years. Indicators related to child protection are one dimension of this broader picture.[98] When there are 50 organizations working in a community, each is affecting this system, but until we are able to discuss cumulative impact based on a common set of indicators and comparative data, it is not possible to talk about system change. Without such a tool that crosses sectors and silos, we will continue simply to report on individual projects. Multiple people noted

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97   There is a growing body of literature and research on "collective impact," which recognizes that large scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination. See: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact; and https://collectiveimpactforum.org/. Ongoing work to apply these tools to conflict and complex emergencies is needed.

98   This work is in part underway, led by the INSPIRE Working Group and based on seven strategies with WHO- and CDC-level evidence for preventing and reducing violence against children. The Working Group is part of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children: http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/inspire/en/.

that there are few private donors who fund research, policy, and programming on conflict and related interventions, and their leadership is needed. The 2016 Peace and Security Funders Index, an analysis of global foundation grantmaking in the peace and security space, noted that less than 1% of total foundation giving goes to these issues.[99] Private donors in particular have the ability to spearhead new approaches, such as collective impact models applied to conflict affected settings and complex emergencies. These types of tools – which put people and not institutions at the center of social change and support new methodologies that attempt to create inclusive processes and then use them to solve community-identified problems – are desperately needed. As one expert noted,

"The international community and donors need to not be afraid of how long [investments in communities] take and to be comfortable with the fact that [this work] doesn't lend itself easily to measurement. We have to think about impact over a long period of time and at the local level – district, sub-district and how to engage these people in collective action. This is where the rubber meets the road on conflict issues. There's all this stuff about people getting radicalized online, but it's really about what is happening in their family and community. The question should not be, what's the problem you are going to tackle in your proposal? But rather, how do you cause change?"[100]

99 https://static1.squarespace.com/static/521b8763e4b03dae28cd3e72/
t/57606e0cab48de1850692070/1465937455913/
Analysis+of+Global+Foundation+Grantmaking

100 Interview, June 2017, Washington, D.C.

5. HOW CAN WE MORE EFFECTIVELY PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CONFLICT SETTINGS?

The preceding discussion raises an overwhelming array of possible entry points to rethink strategic engagement and programming to protect children and youth affected by armed conflict. Some of these recommendations for action are listed below, but first, it is important to frame this discussion by explicitly stating the obvious: no one donor, organization, researcher, or policy-maker can tackle all of these objectives. There is a clear need in general for more "collective impact" thinking, more cohesion and a better strategic approach to address some of these deeply systemic and structural issues. The CPC Learning Network was offered as one such effective model, bridging donors, academics, policymakers, and practitioners. There also is a need for better coordination across the donor community (government, multilateral, and private) and particularly a more nuanced understanding of each other's strategic advantages. Coalitions and partnerships amongst donors are essential to tackling the below objectives in a systematic manner rather than continuing a piecemeal approach. Government donors tend to have access to resources on a scale that few other institutions can match, yet they are also constrained by bureaucratic and regulatory processes as well as political dynamics. Private donors are better positioned to take financial risks and tend to have more flexibility to fund innovative research and pilot programs over a longer time-period and perhaps with more trial and error. Through appropriate partnerships between government and multilateral donors, these innovative efforts could be scaled. One area for collaboration is support to community philanthropy through the establishment of funds; particularly given the long-term nature of these processes, women's and human rights funds and community foundations are smart investments that focus on long-term dividends.[101]

The areas below are entry points for consideration, but these questions and topics should not be considered in isolation. Rather, they should be elements in a broader strategy based on an analysis of how each of these actions complement and build on each other, who is best positioned to fund and implement each type of work, and in which partnerships.

SHIFTING TO COLLECTIVE ACTION: HOW CAN PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES TO PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUTH BE IMPROVED?

For transformation to occur that will begin to address the root causes of conflict and the impacts of armed conflict on children, agencies of all stripes will need to move away from technocratic, siloed projects towards collective impact work. Children and youth themselves will not be tangential to this process; they will necessarily be central. Models of this collective action thinking, including movement-building, are already available in examples like the United We Dream movement, the largest immigrant youth-led network, or the Children's Rights and Violence Prevention Fund, which is building up civil society and community networks to address child rights in select areas in East Africa, through a deep long-term commitment to processes that empower local actors to articulate their own agendas. Such a shift will also require policymakers, donors, and others to ask themselves what successful collective action and movement-building looks like as such measures are unlikely to resemble the objectives and indicators that short-term project logframes have reflected; local actors, seasoned activists, and new champions for children, like Malala Yousafzai and Ahed Tamini, should be leading the way to define what success looks like.

■ Support collective actions, coalitions for collective actions and movements with a focus on empowering truly grassroots actors (which doesn't always equate "civil society") and linking communities to national systems.

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101 Kilmurry, A. (2017). *Funding in Conflict-Affected Environments: Notes for Grantmakers*. Social Change Initiative.

- Invest in the international community's ability to be more strategic partners, including:

  ➤ the development of long-term (10-year) strategies that can be implemented in donor-funded one-, two, and five-year cycles;

  ➤ a common set of indicators around preventing violence at a cumulative level that *includes factors related to child protection as one element* – i.e., linking current work on child protection to other conflict prevention processes.

- Support governments to integrate refugee populations into national systems, in particular regarding education and access to social services.

- Create synergies between evolving understandings of fragility and newly developing global refugee architects and how the child protection agenda may fit within them, conceptually and programmatically (e.g., access to services and supports that mitigate later grievances, such as education, civic participation, and livelihoods).

- Look at how silos *within* the humanitarian response to emergencies and *between* the humanitarian, development, and human rights communities can be broken down to promote better coordination and more effective policy and advocacy.

- Invest in research, such as the work of AC4 and others on complex adaptive systems and child protection systems, and applying it, in particular helping decision-makers at the international, national, and local levels identify intervention points to protect children in complex and shifting systems.

FROM REGULATION TO RESILIENCE: WHAT FURTHER WORK IS NEEDED TO IMPROVE REGULATORY MECHANISMS?

Regulation as it is currently defined within the realm of children affected by armed conflict is limited almost entirely to a security-focused, compliance-driven model. Agencies will need to move beyond this for the conceptualization and the practice of "regulation" to systematically promote resilience in children, families, and communities. In essence, the model will need to shift from a negative peace paradigm to a positive one, with the overarching question being reframed as, "How does the regulatory environment bolster children's resilience and allow them to lead healthier, more fulfilling lives in their families and communities?"

Relatedly, policymakers will need to move beyond the policies themselves – the drafting of resolutions, compacts, and the like – and better incorporate a dynamic information systems perspective (e.g., what is actually happening in real time and how can it be improved). How will policymakers know if their policies have reached and improved the lives of children and families? How can these often cumbersome mechanisms incorporate information that would improve them with greater facility? Crafting the right language matters, yes, but so do material improvements in people's lives.

- Ensure that appropriate advocacy is conducted around the parallel process to the MMC/Global Compacts looking specifically at the gaps for children and youth in the global regulatory and rights protecting regime. This parallel process should last well beyond the in-progress development of the Global Compacts and contribute to the collective action and movement-building proposed above.

- Focus on supporting local capacity, including local human rights documenters and organizations, linking these groups to international mechanisms like the MRM system and ensuring that the information they provide is not blocked for political reasons, thereby improving the MRM process.

- Conduct research on what deters violations against children specifically, and particularly: the relationship between criminal accountability and deterrence, *and* processes outside of criminal accountability that may better meet children's needs and ultimately serve this purpose more effectively through preventing conflict.

- Focus on looking at lessons learned across different processes (armed group and gang recruitment, DDR, violent extremism) and compile programmatic and policy strategies to prevent violations of children's rights. This compilation should focus in particular on: strategic approaches to convincing governments not to take overly-securitized approaches that foster grievances; helping governments implement service-provision strategies in remote and borderland areas where criminal and extremist groups thrive; and bolstering early childhood outcomes that lead to vulnerabilities later in life.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER: HOW CAN PROGRAMMING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFECTED BY CONFLICT BE IMPROVED?

Programs for children affected by armed conflict will need to continue to wrestle with what a "systems approach" means, examining how interventions at all levels of the socio-ecological model are interlinked. In doing so, several of the developments discussed above – movement away from a developmental pathological approach to psychosocial wellbeing; research about deprivation and structural violence and heightened distress; the definitive importance of ECD for crucial lifelong outcomes; and the need to focus on a lifespan approach – can serve to inform more comprehensive and coherently designed programs. Although humanitarian actors fear the risk of adopting a rights-based approach (as opposed to the humanitarian approach), we need to continue to break down these false constructions and seek a "both/and" worldview that can bridge human rights and humanitarianism.

Specific ways to move forward in improving programming include:

■ Invest in research and applied strategies that focus on better understanding the role of key relationships and social context as protective factors for children and youth.

■ Elaborate and synthesize research and practice on older children, adolescents and young adults – the field of youth and conflict is ripe for definition. There are huge opportunities for further research on the adolescent responses to adversity in low-income settings and their experience of resilience.

■ Look at the role of livelihoods and affiliation needs in improving protection and wellbeing as well as in preventing children and youth from joining armed groups.

■ Fund a continued elaboration of systems approaches to child protection, including training methodologies, programmatic approaches, and impact analyses.

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