



# Child Soldiers

*Care & Protection of Children in Emergencies*  
*A Field Guide* • Mark Lorey

Cover photo by Gary Shaye:  
*Photographed in the SC impact area near Negele, Ethiopia.*

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## FOREWORD

Every day it is estimated that some 5000 children are newly displaced due to conflict somewhere in the world. Many may be able to flee violence with their families, but an increasing number become separated and are being recruited into armed groups as a result of war erupting. Whether as victims or perpetrators of violence, during conflict children see the protective social fabric around them collapse as homes are destroyed, families uprooted, schools and health services ransacked, and communities consumed by violence.

In situations that pose a violent, extreme or sudden threat to the survival and well-being of children and women, Save the Children's basic objectives are to *ensure the survival* of the most vulnerable children and women; *assure protection* against violence and exploitation; *support the rehabilitation and recovery* of children, families and communities; and *promote lasting solutions* by creating and strengthening the capacity of families and communities to create an environment in which children can thrive.

Over the past decade we have seen the number of child soldiers increasing — as small arms and light weapons become more available and children are more easily armed, and as conflicts continue to simmer in forgotten corners of the post-Cold War world. Recruitment into armed groups is a particularly dangerous threat to children, not only to their immediate survival but to the potential for their development and long-term well-being in their communities. With the Optional Protocol to the CRC now coming into force and raising the legal age of recruitment to the age of 18, the international community has an even stronger mandate to protect children. However, legal instruments will only go so far in preventing recruitment in any given village, and it is important that we continue to advocate for programs which prevent recruitment and help children reintegrate into their communities once they are demobilized.

This *Field Guide to Child Soldier Programs in Emergencies* is a step in building Save the Children's capacity to respond to these concerns, and should be considered as a resource not only for those working in refugee settings but also in any situation where young people may become militarized and drawn into armed groups. With programs and strong advocacy, we can work towards protecting children from this most vicious form of exploitation in conflict.

**Dr. Neil Boothby**

*Director, Children in Crisis  
Save the Children*





# INTRODUCTION

Save the Children is pleased to introduce this *Field Guide to Child Soldier Programs in Emergencies*, as one in a series compiled through its Children and War Capacity Building Initiative. Through this initiative, Save the Children has made a clear institutional commitment to providing quality programs which support children's well-being in emergencies and crisis, and to ensuring that SC staff have the knowledge and skills they need to continue this important work.

After consultations with staff at both headquarters and in the field, it became clear that there was a need not only for a thematic overview on key protection concerns, but also a quick and practical reference for practitioners when facing new emergencies or designing new programs. With this in mind, the Children in Crisis Unit has designed this series of field guides as the basis for in-depth training sessions on priority subjects, while including quick implementation tools such as checklists of key concerns, sample forms, job descriptions, and rapid guideline references in a portable format.

The field guides have been designed specifically for SC field, headquarters, and partner organization staff members who are involved in the design and management of children and war programs. As such, the series builds on Save the Children's specific approach and programming principles while also bringing in best practices and examples from other agencies' experience. At the same time, however, we hope that these field guides may also prove useful to other organizations engaged in similar programming and contribute to the further development of child-focused emergency programs within the international community.

The *Field Guide to Child Soldier Programs in Emergencies* has greatly benefited from the contributions of Amy Hepburn, Tanya Wolfram, and Naoko Otani during production and field-testing. Dr. Laura Arntson has provided useful additions to the monitoring and evaluation sections. Valuable comments from Jane Lowicki have enriched the guide and expanded its scope.

The *Field Guide to Child Soldier Programs in Emergencies* is an important manual for Save the Children to be putting forward at this time, as the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict has just entered into force. Now attention must focus on realizing the rights of children on the ground and in conflicts, bringing the legal guidelines to bear on children's lives. Prevention of recruitment is a critical protection concern in any conflict, and reintegration of former child soldiers is a long-term issue which requires many partners. I hope that this guide will challenge your thinking about children caught in conflict, and that it will build our capacity and that of our partners to respond to their needs.

**Christine Knudsen**

*Children and War Specialist  
Save the Children*





# I. OVERVIEW

## OVERVIEW OF THE CHILDREN AND WAR PROGRAM FIELD GUIDE SERIES

This field guide is one in a series compiled by Save the Children (SC) as part of its Children and War Capacity Building Initiative. The SC Children in Crisis Unit developed this initiative in order to support SC staff in responding to the priority care and protection needs of children and adolescents during new emergencies and in situations of chronic armed conflict or displacement.

Save the Children recognizes children as being any person under the age of 18, including adolescents as well as younger children. Children of all ages are of key concern to Save the Children, and their specific needs and resources are priority considerations in any programming decision. For the sake of brevity, the term “children” will be used in this document to encompass all individuals under the age of 18, while recognizing that the needs and resources of adolescents and younger children may vary significantly and should be considered specifically when designing programs.

The field guides are intended to provide comprehensive, hands-on guidance for programming in each of six key thematic areas during emergencies and crisis:

- ***Education in emergencies:*** focusing on the transition from non-formal to formal education activities in order to foster sustainability and community involvement.
- ***Youth:*** an approach to planning non-formal education, vocational training, community mobilization, and other activities for 13-25 year-olds.
- ***Separated children:*** care and protection of children separated from families as well as steps to take toward reunification.
- ***Child soldiers:*** social reintegration and the prevention of recruitment of girls and boys.
- ***Sexual and gender-based violence:*** prevention of violence and support to SGBV survivors.
- ***Psychosocial care and support:*** a resource kit applicable for all areas of children and war programming.

The field guides have been cross-referenced and designed as complementary documents. While there are clearly a number of areas of overlap among the themes, repetition has been minimized while ensuring that each field guide remains a useful stand-alone document. Each field guide is also accompanied by a CD-ROM which contains key reference materials and international guidelines for further consideration, as well as practical tools which can be easily modified for use in a specific situation.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD GUIDE FOR CHILD SOLDIER PROGRAMS**

The *Field Guide to Child Soldier Programs in Emergencies* is intended for Save the Children staff and partners designing and implementing either a program focused fully on child soldiers, or a child soldiers-focused component of a broader program for war-affected children. This field guide is meant to be useful both for staff that have limited experience with child soldier programming and for experienced staff that wish to improve their understanding of particular aspects of child soldier programs.

The field guide is composed of five parts and two appendices, supplemented by a CD-ROM with relevant reference materials. Section II, *The Issues*, defines child soldiers, explains their specific strengths and vulnerabilities, discusses the reasons for developing programs that target this group, and presents SC's principles for child soldier programming. Section III presents a synopsis of the *international and national legal and policy frameworks* relevant to child soldier programs.

Section IV, *Programming Framework*, provides a structured summary of programming options in each of the three major areas of child soldier programs: prevention of recruitment, demobilization, and reintegration. Section V discusses the *Programming Process* and leads the reader through a step-by-step explanation of designing and managing child soldier programs. Section VI, the *Conclusion*, provides a summary checklist of key issues and questions to consider when implementing child soldier programs.



## II. THE ISSUES

### WHO ARE CHILD SOLDIERS?

This field guide uses the definition of child soldiers as established in the Cape Town Principles:

*“Any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.”<sup>1</sup>*

Save the Children designs child soldier programs that target not only those children who have actively participated in combat, but also the many other children used by government or opposition forces. Children are often required to play a number of roles in addition to the roles identified in the definition above. These roles include spies, bomb carriers, sentries, and human shields. Children are also often used to lay and clear landmines. As they grow older and stronger, children in armed groups may be ‘promoted’ from lesser servant roles to active combat roles.

Child soldiers often include very young children, as young as seven in some situations, as well as older children and teenagers. The upper age of eighteen as defined in the Cape Town Principles corresponds to the threshold between childhood and adulthood defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children may be forced to join armed groups through forced conscription or abduction, or they may join ‘voluntarily’ for their own protection and survival. The term ‘voluntary’ should be used cautiously when discussing child soldiers, as joining is often the only option available to children and this action is rarely ‘voluntary’ in any genuine sense.

Children are recruited and used by armed groups around the world — both government and opposition — for a variety of reasons. It is generally easier to abduct, subjugate, and manipulate children than adults. Children are more impressionable and vulnerable to indoctrination. They can learn skills and tasks quickly, and they can be fast and agile on a battlefield. They are more willing than adults to take risks. Children are seen as more loyal

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<sup>1</sup>The full text of the *Cape Town Principles*, the leading international guidance on child soldier policy and programming, can be found on the reference materials CD-ROM.

and less threatening to adult leadership. It is easier for children to slip through enemy lines unnoticed, making them effective spies and bomb carriers. Children are typically viewed as cheap and expendable labor; they require less food and no payment. In addition, using child soldiers can present a moral dilemma to enemies: should they kill children?

## REGIONS AND COUNTRIES WITH CHILD SOLDIERS

The use of child soldiers has become more common in the last thirty years. Social norms have changed, traditions have altered, and instability has increased in many areas. Also, the proliferation of inexpensive, lightweight weapons has made it easier to use children as soldiers. These small arms are lethal and easy to hide, transport, and use with little training.

In 2001, it was estimated that more than 300,000 children are actively participating today in more than thirty armed conflicts in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union. The box below identifies the countries with child soldiers as of mid-2001.

### BOX 2.1: COUNTRIES WITH CHILD SOLDIERS FIGHTING IN CURRENT AND RECENT CONFLICTS

g = government forces, p = paramilitaries, o = armed opposition groups

#### Africa

Algeria (p,o)  
 Angola (g,o)  
 Burundi (g,o)  
 Chad (g)  
 Congo-Brazzaville (g,o)  
 Congo-Kinshasa (g,o)  
 Eritrea (g,o)  
 Ethiopia (g)  
 Liberia (g,o)  
 Rwanda (g,o)  
 Sierra Leone (g,p,o)  
 Somalia (g,p,o)  
 Sudan (g,p,o)  
 Uganda (g,o)

#### Asia

Afghanistan (g,p,o)  
 India (p,o)  
 Indonesia (p,o)  
 Myanmar (g,o)  
 Nepal (o)  
 Pakistan (o)  
 Philippines (o)  
 Solomon Islands (o)  
 Sri Lanka (o)  
 East Timor (p,o)  
 Tajikistan (o)  
 Papua New Guinea (o)  
 Uzbekistan (o)

#### Middle East

Iran (g,o)  
 Iraq (g,o)  
 Israel/Palestine (g,o)  
 Lebanon (o)

#### Latin America

Colombia (p,o)  
 Mexico (p,o)  
 Peru (o)

#### Europe

Russian Federation (o)  
 Turkey (o)  
 Yugoslavia (p,o)

From the *Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers*, [www.child-soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org)

## VULNERABILITIES OF CHILD SOLDIERS

On the battlefield, children armed with light weapons can be as deadly as their adult counterparts. They are often sent on the most dangerous missions, such as checking for mines, spying, and leading attacks. Thus, it is not surprising that child soldiers typically have higher casualty rates than adults. They are more likely to take ill-judged risks, and their bodies are more susceptible to complications if injured. In addition to injuries, child soldiers may face a variety of other health problems, including malnutrition, poor hygiene and health care, respiratory and skin infections, and punishment by physical abuse or deprivation.

Some armed groups force children to use drugs to desensitize them to violence and enhance their performance. Use of cocaine, amphetamines, and other stimulants is especially common. These drugs can cause lasting harm to the bodies and minds of child soldiers. Children leaving armed groups that force drug use may have a difficult time overcoming drug addiction and withdrawal.

All child soldiers are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation by others in the armed group. The risks are usually much higher for girls. Sexually abused children are at high risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Girls are at risk of unwanted pregnancies. These pregnancies can be very dangerous for the girls, who are often malnourished, physically immature, and living in unsanitary conditions.

In addition to the physical vulnerabilities they face, child soldiers' social and psychological development is often damaged by their experience in the armed group. Children are routinely exposed to terrible acts of violence and brutality. They are often brutalized themselves as part of an indoctrination process. They may also be encouraged or forced to brutalize others — beating or killing adversaries, those seen as 'traitors,' and sometimes even members of their own family or community. This is intended to erode children's desire to escape and return home, as well as to form a bond with other members of the armed group.

Due to this initiation and their subsequent experiences, child soldiers will often feel deeply alienated from their families or communities. Some child soldiers are seized from their communities when they are very young and serve so long in an armed group that they lose all recollection of what a family is and how it functions. Many children lose their sense of identity outside the armed group and its violent value system. In addition, child soldiers are deprived of many of the opportunities that their non-soldier peers may have: normal

family life, normal developmental experiences, and educational opportunities. These deprivations and the other traumas that child soldiers suffer can be manifested in a range of ways, including nightmares, withdrawal from others, and outbursts of anger and aggression.

Despite the extreme trauma they have faced, however, child soldiers who survive their experience are remarkably resilient. Many seek simply to restart their lives and put their past behind them. In order to survive, child soldiers have often developed ingenious coping skills and gained strong leadership experience. With targeted reintegration and rehabilitation support, many child soldiers can reconnect with their family loyalties and their religious, traditional, and moral values after leaving the forces. They can begin their lives anew.

One significant factor influencing children's well-being and capacity to recover is what they have done — and what has been done to them. Children's age at time of recruitment also influences their ability to readjust to civilian life. Another key factor, noted in SC's experience in Mozambique, is the duration of children's stay in an armed group. Those that stayed less than six months seemed quite capable of returning home and readopting traditional values. Their initial aggressive behavior and distrust of adults subsided in time. Children who had stayed for more than a year seemed to see themselves not as victims but as members of the forces. They had a much more difficult time transitioning and reintegrating.

An additional factor is the type of support that children receive in their process of reintegration. Although no long-term studies have been conducted on rehabilitation programs for child soldiers, anecdotal information from Mozambique indicates that those who took part in SC programs and were supported during their reintegration process have been able to maintain relationships as adults, marry, and hold jobs more effectively than those who attempted to reintegrate without support. Developing targeted programs to support child soldiers is often challenging, but is essential to their future well-being and the future of the post-conflict society.

## WHY DEVELOP PROGRAMMING FOCUSED ON CHILD SOLDIERS?

In emergencies and post-conflict situations, Save the Children develops programs specifically focused on child soldiers or broader programs that include a child soldier component for several reasons. Child soldiers are an especially vulnerable group — physically and psychosocially — of war-affected children due to the suffering that they witnessed, experienced, or caused to others. Further, there are real differences, rooted in the children's experiences as victims and perpetrators of atrocities, between child soldiers and other war-affected children. Former child soldiers benefit from many programs supporting youth and children in their community, but usually require some forms of assistance that address their specific experiences and provide specific protection.

The successful reintegration of child soldiers into their communities can be healing for the communities as well as the children, enabling communities to forgive, reconcile, and move beyond the conflict period. If they are not assisted during the demobilization or reintegration stage of post-conflict recovery, child soldiers present a potential threat to future security. If not reintegrated into society successfully, they are at high risk of recruitment into armed groups, criminal organizations, or other groups that are harmful to the state and society. Support for child soldier programming is an investment in future stability and security.

However, it is important that SC staff balance assistance for child soldiers with assistance for all war-affected children. While child soldiers are an especially vulnerable group, they are rarely more than a small minority of all children affected by armed conflict in an area. Care should be taken to provide support in such a way that it does not cause dangerous jealousies in a situation of scarce resources, further stigmatize former combatants within their own society, or lead to perverse incentives which could lead children to join or pretend to join armed groups to gain these kinds of benefits.

Interim care centers or similar facilities typically include not only demobilized child soldiers, but also other unaccompanied children and other children in need of protection; in this setting, most of the needs of child soldiers' are similar to those of other children. Initiatives to address child soldiers' unique needs should be implemented only when the basic needs of all children in the facility have been met. In a community, providing more assistance to child

soldiers than to other children may work against the intended aim of reintegrating the former child soldiers because it can emphasize their difference from other children, fostering resentment and sometimes leading to stigmatization and isolation of the child soldiers. Sections IV and V of this field guide discuss ways of designing programs that balance benefits to child soldiers with benefits for all war-affected children.



### III. INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

This brief synopsis of legal and policy frameworks on child soldiers issues is intended to give program designers and managers background information for their advocacy and program development efforts. This section summarizes the international legal and policy instruments related to child soldiers and discusses the application of these instruments in national contexts. Other key national laws and policies related to child soldiers are also identified.

#### INTERNATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK<sup>2</sup>

International law definitively bans the recruitment of children under 15 years old and prohibits their direct participation in any armed groups, whether government armies or opposition groups. In 2000, the UN adopted a new protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that raises the international legal age of recruitment to eighteen.

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* is the most comprehensive and widely ratified human rights treaty in existence. Although it defines a child as anyone under the age of 18 and sets out provisions for the protection and care of children affected by armed conflict, it somewhat incongruously puts the age of legal recruitment and participation in armed conflict at 15.<sup>3</sup> Formally, the CRC is only legally binding on governments, but it can also be used to advocate with armed opposition groups.

The *Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* addresses the age discrepancy in the CRC by explicitly establishing 18 as the minimum age for direct participation in armed conflict. It also requires all State Parties to make it a criminal offense for non-governmental armed groups to recruit anyone under 18. While governments must not conscript children under 18 into the armed forces, they may recruit persons between the age of 16 and 18 with a series of established safeguards ensuring that such recruitment is genuinely voluntary, that it is done with the informed consent of the minor's parents or legal guardians, that recruits are fully informed of the duties involved in military service, that proof of age is established, and that soldiers are not deployed before the age of 18.

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<sup>2</sup>See the accompanying CD-ROM for the full text of several of these instruments and relevant excerpts from the others.

<sup>3</sup>Where national law sets an age higher than 15 years as the minimum age of recruitment, that higher age applies.

The ***African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*** defines a child as anyone under the age of 18. The Charter precludes the recruitment of children and their participation in armed conflict. It further requires State Parties to protect civilians and ensure respect for all rules of international humanitarian law applicable to children in all armed conflict, including internal conflict.

The ***1977 Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions*** set the legal age of recruitment at 15 and require special protection and treatment for children in armed conflict. Importantly, the protocols also apply to all parties to a conflict; Additional Protocol I relates to international armed conflicts and Additional Protocol II relates to non-international or internal conflicts within States.

The ***Statute of the International Criminal Court*** lists the use of child combatants younger than 15 as a war crime. The court has jurisdiction over both international armed conflicts and those internal conflicts that meet certain criteria.

Although not a legal document, the ***Cape Town Principles*** represent an important consensus among major international NGOs and UNICEF and offer useful guidance in developing policy and programs that protect and support child soldiers. In addition to defining key terms, the principles provide a comprehensive overview of appropriate action related to the prevention of recruitment, demobilization, and reintegration of child soldiers.

## **NATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS**

At the domestic level, it is important for SC program designers and managers to understand how international legal instruments relating to child soldiers have been incorporated into national legislation and policies. Even when appropriate policies have been adopted, governments often fail to enact these policies effectively. An examination of laws and policies relevant to child soldiers must be accompanied by a careful assessment of the status of enforcement and the level of popular knowledge of the policies. In many national contexts, it may be necessary for SC staff to engage in advocacy efforts to protect child soldiers by calling for introduction of new laws, changes in existing laws, or improved implementation of existing laws. The international instruments described above can serve as useful tools for these advocacy efforts, particularly if the program country government has signed and/or ratified any of the instruments.

Until the 1999 Lomé Peace Accords for Sierra Leone, no international peace agreement had recognized the participation of child soldiers or incorporated their needs in national demobilization plans. Without explicit mention of child soldiers, their specific needs will not be addressed during disarmament and demobilization, and reintegration may prove even more difficult. It is important for SC staff to advocate for explicit recognition of and provision for child soldiers when peace agreements and demobilization plans are being drawn up.

Increased official recognition of the participation of children in conflicts has led to active debate recently around the legal status of child soldiers upon demobilization. The general trend appears to be to hold young people more accountable and include them in the jurisdiction of post-conflict tribunals. However, many NGOs that work directly with child soldiers have advocated that it is in children's best interest to keep child soldiers out of post-conflict legal proceedings. The Sierra Leonean experience with this issue is discussed in Box 3.1.

Several areas of national legislation and policy should be examined by designers and managers of child soldier programming:

- **Recruitment of children:** Is national legislation in place criminalizing the recruitment of children? Are military and other local actors aware of the laws regarding recruitment? Are these laws followed by the military and by armed opposition groups? Are there effective national mechanisms for providing birth registration and proof of age to all children?
- **Status of children upon demobilization:** Are captured child combatants interrogated and tried in domestic courts or handed over directly to NGOs or UNICEF? Will they be subject to prosecution for war crimes in tribunals after demobilization? How will their expected legal status affect the decisions of individual children to run away from armed groups or otherwise demobilize?
- **Other relevant national policies and institutional responses:** Have the relevant national ministries developed policies regarding child soldiers? Do formal child protection networks exist on the national or local levels? What other government or community institutions are currently interacting with child ex-combatants, and how? In post-conflict situations, how do countrywide disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) plans incorporate the specific needs of child combatants?

### BOX 3.1: CHILD SOLDIERS AND THE SPECIAL COURT IN SIERRA LEONE

In August of 2000, as part of the United Nations intervention in Sierra Leone, a proposal was made for an independent Special Court to prosecute violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed during the war in Sierra Leone. Frustrated with the blanket amnesty applied by the Lome Peace Accords in 1999, many Sierra Leoneans and international NGOs have vigorously supported the prosecution of human rights violations committed since the time of that signing. They argue that impunity contributes to continuing patterns of human rights abuses and that this impunity must be broken in order to foster a society more likely to respect human rights in the future. Finding the appropriate balance between justice for those who suffered and the need for national peace and stability is always difficult in post-conflict situations. Ensuring respect for the individual rights of child combatants in Sierra Leone, including the right to rehabilitation, must take place within the context of these national considerations.

The proposed court has raised the question not only of how best to respond to human rights abuses suffered by children, but also to those committed by children. While it is widely agreed that the court should prioritize the prosecution of those who have recruited children as soldiers, debate has raged concerning the court's jurisdiction over the actions of the child soldiers themselves. The proposed court would allow prosecutions of children aged between 15 and 18. In contrast, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court excludes children under the age of 18 from the court's jurisdiction.

UNICEF and NGOs involved in the care and protection of child soldiers in Sierra Leone have expressed strong reservations that any child under 18 would be tried in the court. Most human rights organizations have argued that as long as it is done according to procedural guarantees of juvenile justice and that punishment is strictly rehabilitative, that some of the worst offenders might appropriately be held accountable. The UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has suggested that focusing on the "most responsible" offenders would perhaps involve those most in need of rehabilitative support but least likely to seek it otherwise. Proponents of including children in the court's jurisdiction say a critical assessment would be made of the child's age, vulnerabilities, awareness of the choices open to him or her, and other mitigating factors taken into account. Punishment would be rehabilitative and in the best interests of the child, aimed at reintegration into society. Detention and institutions would be used only as a last resort. These proponents also argue that if children are not held responsible for their actions, adult commanders may attempt to escape prosecution by forcing children to commit atrocities instead.

What is better for children, society and respect for human rights in the short and long run? The pragmatic question is whether the provisions laid out above will be adequately communicated to and understood by the Sierra Leonean population. If not, a plan to prosecute children could very likely discourage them from coming forward for demobilization, an outcome surely not in their best interest. And if adequate funding is not available, will the experience be as child-friendly and rehabilitative as promised? For example, if resources are lacking, children could end up being held in close proximity to adult prisoners, at risk of bullying, overcrowding and sexual abuse. It is possible that the recommended rehabilitative services may simply not be available. On the other hand, a mandate from the Special Court to provide rehabilitation and support to former child combatants might, if taken seriously enough by the international community, be the best way to ensure that their rights are respected and protected in post-conflict Sierra Leone.

## IV. PROGRAMMING FRAMEWORK

### SAVE THE CHILDREN'S PRINCIPLES FOR CHILD SOLDIER PROGRAMS

Save the Children Federation has developed six principles to guide and strengthen its programs worldwide. This section discusses the application of these principles to child soldier programming.

1. *Child-centeredness.* Children are central to SC's mission. SC is committed to protecting and fulfilling the rights of child soldiers and of all children. In many cases, child soldiers are not perceived as children, but only as former combatants. In these cases, SC works towards ensuring that all children's rights are known and their specific needs are taken into account in post-conflict settings. SC takes a holistic approach to child development, promoting the psychosocial well-being of child soldiers and all children as well as addressing their physical and material needs.
2. *Gender equity.* SC is committed to ensuring that its programs recognize and respond to the gender-specific vulnerabilities and strengths of female and male child soldiers. Girls and boys fulfill different roles within armed groups both during and after conflict: needs assessment and program design must include a gender analysis of these differences in order to support girls and boys in an appropriate way that facilitates their rehabilitation and reintegration. Programs should not focus only on children who used weapons; they should also assist children who served armed groups in other capacities. Special efforts should be made to assist girls who have survived sexual and other gender-based violence.
3. *Empowerment.* At the level of the individual child, SC is committed to ensuring the participation of former child soldiers and all children in decisions and actions that affect them, as much as possible according to the children's age and maturity. At the program level, SC is committed to facilitating action to assist child soldiers that is community-based and community-led, enabling local people and organizations to cope with the social reintegration and care for child soldiers.

4. *Sustainability.* Because SC is committed to ensuring that the benefits to child soldiers are lasting, SC child soldier programs emphasize long-term social reintegration of child soldiers and prevention of recruitment. Because SC is committed to ensuring that local organizations are able to respond to future child soldier challenges, SC works to strengthen the capacity of partner communities and other organizations (including local NGOs and governments) to assist child soldiers. SC also seeks to balance emergency response with assistance for transitional periods and the long term.
5. *Scaling up.* SC is committed to reaching as many child soldiers as possible while maintaining a high level of quality in its programs.
6. *Measurable impact.* SC is committed to ensuring that its programs have substantial positive impacts on the lives of former child soldiers. Thus all SC child soldier programs should have clear objectives and should report accurately and meaningfully on program activities and outcomes.

## **CHILD SOLDIER PROGRAMMING FRAMEWORK**

This part of the field guide discusses the three components of the Save the Children framework for child soldier programming:

- Prevention of recruitment
- Demobilization
- Reintegration

Each section will briefly explain the component, then discuss possible programming options. It is the responsibility of SC program designers and managers to determine which of these components and options are appropriate in each context. Because the three components are closely related and often overlap, SC staff will often choose to draw options from all three components.

The factors that SC staff should consider when selecting programming options include:

- The status of the conflict — still ongoing, recently ended, likely to re-erupt, etc.
- The situation of child soldiers and their communities.
- The nature and status of action already being taken to assist child soldiers and other war-affected children.
- SC's organizational capacity.
- The availability of funding.

Detailed guidance on conducting a situation assessment to secure the key information needed for program design is discussed in a later section — the Child Soldier Programming Process. another discusses the process of child soldier program design and strategic planning. Section V presents summary checklists for use by program designers when considering program strategy and options.

It is important to understand that the formal demobilization and reintegration process may apply only to some child soldiers. In many contexts, most child soldiers are not involved in formal disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs for a variety of reasons:

- no formal DDR programs may be planned;
- DDR programs may not yet have started;
- child soldiers may not be recognized in the DDR policy and program; or
- coverage of existing programs may be limited and allow children to 'slip through the cracks.'

SC's role is to work with DDR planners to ensure that children are included in the programs, to expand coverage for all child soldiers, and to facilitate reintegration by providing psychosocial support as well as follow up activities with the child's community and family. SC should also incorporate actions intended to be of benefit to child soldiers into community programs for all war-affected children.

### ***Prevention of recruitment***

Recruitment is the general term for any way in which a person becomes part of an armed group. It is important for program designers and managers to explore and understand how

children in the program area are recruited and by whom (government, rebel forces, paramilitaries etc.). This understanding in turn shapes the design of efforts to prevent recruitment.

### **THREE FORMS OF RECRUITMENT**

Armed groups may use one or more of the following three forms of recruitment of children to be soldiers.

#### **Forced recruitment**

Abduction is the most commonly used method of forced recruitment. Children may be taken from their homes, schools, orphanages, and elsewhere. Adolescents working in area markets and as street vendors are often targeted for forced recruitment. Armed groups sometimes cross borders into other countries to recruit children. In addition to the direct consequence of separating children from their families and forcing them into servitude, this form of recruitment can result in a variety of indirect consequences as well. The fear of forced recruitment can discourage families from sending their children to school or allowing them to play outside the home, thus limiting the children's opportunities to engage in healthy developmental activities. Fear of recruitment can also damage adolescents' chances of earning a livelihood by requiring them to avoid marketplaces and other areas where they are at risk of abduction.

#### **Compulsory recruitment including conscription by government<sup>4</sup>**

Even when governments have committed not to recruit children, people under 18 may be recruited because:

- Children and parents/caregivers are unaware of the ban on child service in the armed forces.
- Recruiters may be unaware of age restrictions or under instructions to ignore the restrictions.
- Few enforcement mechanisms and safeguards exist to prevent recruitment of children.
- Armed forces may disregard their international and domestic legal commitments in times of 'emergency.'
- Children lack proof of age (i.e. birth registration or identity documents).
- If recruitment is done using indirect methods — i.e. by a village headman or other leader mandated by an armed group — then there is often corruption that leads to recruitment of underage children from vulnerable groups: destitute households and others that do not have the political influence or financial power to avoid recruitment.

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<sup>4</sup>Armed non-governmental groups may also engage in these practices.

### **“Voluntary” recruitment**

Although children may come forward to join an armed group without conscription or press-ganging, this type of recruitment is rarely truly voluntary. Children may have no other option for survival in a conflict where they have lost family members or access to other forms of protection. Children often join an armed group after their parents have been killed or separated from the children. Children may also join if an adult caregiver has joined or been conscripted. By joining, children may seek to earn some income to support their household as well as themselves. Children may even be encouraged to join by parents in difficult economic circumstances. Joining an armed group may also be seen as a way to gain power and status. This aspect of service can be especially appealing when children themselves have been victimized, perpetuating a cycle of violence. In addition, joining can be a way for children to gain revenge for mistreatment by an opposing group. Children may also join an armed group because of a sense of hopelessness about the future and a desire to assert some control over life. Finally, children do not yet have the cognitive developmental skills to fully assess risks and choices that they may make under these conditions.

### **CHILDREN ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE TO RECRUITMENT**

To design effective recruitment prevention programs, it is important to understand which groups of children in the program area are especially vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. A child may fall into more than one of these four categories.

#### **Children in or near conflict zones**

Children in or near conflict zones are more susceptible to abduction and other forced recruitment due to the presence of armed groups. Children are also especially vulnerable to recruitment in these areas because conflict can damage or destroy other means of protecting and supporting children, including families, homes, schools, churches, and other community institutions. These impacts of conflict can force children into destitution and desperation, making them more susceptible to recruitment. In addition, in conflict zones it is more likely that children or their families will have experienced abuse at the hands of a fighting force, leading the children to join an opposing force for protection or revenge.

**Children may be especially vulnerable to recruitment if they are:**

- In or near conflict zones
- Separated from or without families
- Socially or economically marginalized
- Members of targeted minority groups

### **Children separated from or without families**

Separated children lack the support and guidance provided by a family. They may seek identification with an alternative community: the armed group. Recruiters can easily find them if they are on the streets, in orphanages, or in camps for refugees or the internally displaced. In these situations, children may have no other means of survival and need the physical protection of these powerful groups to assure their own future.

### **Children who are marginalized and economically and/or socially deprived**

Street children, refugee children, and internally displaced children are especially vulnerable because they may feel disaffected or powerless and therefore will be more open to the promises of belonging to a powerful armed group which will also provide them with protection, shelter, food, and other basics of survival

### **Children of certain minority groups — religious, racial, national, or ethnic**

In polarized ethno-political conflicts, children may have experienced targeted violence that can lead to a desire for revenge by the child or the child's family. These children are more easily militarized and recruited by armed groups.

## **PROGRAMMING OPTIONS**

SC program designers and managers should consider developing recruitment prevention initiatives throughout a conflict cycle:

- Before a conflict erupts, in areas where conflict may be likely;
- During a conflict; and
- Well after a peace agreement is reached, as conflicts often re-emerge in strife-torn areas.

A recruitment prevention initiative is usually not a separate program. Instead, it is standard practice that prevention initiatives are explicitly and intentionally integrated with various child protection approaches in existing relief and development programs. For example, a prevention recruitment emphasis can be included in a community-based vocational training program for adolescents or in an emergency education curriculum for children in refugee camps.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to include a clearly articulated emphasis on preventing recruitment during program implementation. Prevention of recruitment is an essential protection priority when developing and implementing programs with children and youth in any high-risk or

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<sup>5</sup>For further discussion of this topic, refer to the *Field Guide to Education Programs in Emergencies* by C. Triplehorn in this series.

unstable environment. Prevention of recruitment, even while supporting the demobilization or reintegration of child soldiers is an integrated part of SC's priorities in emergency programming. Failure to prevent recruitment will make the challenges of demobilization and reintegration even more difficult and costly in the future. It is also important to make efforts to prevent the re-recruitment of children who have been demobilized or otherwise left the armed groups. Recruitment prevention actions should be part of all child soldier demobilization and reintegration programs — including those implemented during periods of conflict, when ex-child soldiers make prime candidates for re-recruitment, and those implemented after a conflict has ended, when there is a high risk that conflict and child recruitment may re-emerge.

### **Risk mapping**

Risk mapping is a good first step in recruitment prevention as it helps identify risk factors influencing the recruitment of child soldiers in a program area and form a broad picture of the protection situation of children in a community, a district/province, or a country. Recruitment prevention interventions can then be designed to counter these factors. Key risk factors to consider include:

- Types of children at particular risk of recruitment — age, gender, religion, race, nationality, ethnicity, geographic location, socioeconomic status.
- Groups most likely to recruit children.
- Areas where fighting is occurring or likely to occur.
- Areas where groups of children congregate — schools, orphanages, refugee camps, playing fields.

### **Education and awareness-raising campaigns**

Many recruitment prevention initiatives take the form of public education and awareness-raising in various settings. Key target audiences include recruiters and armed groups, children, parents and caregivers, teachers, community leaders, and others. It is important that all these parties are informed of existing restrictions on recruiting children. It is also important that children and the adults who care for them are aware of how to avoid recruitment and what avenues of appeal exist if a child is recruited.

One way of reaching a wide audience is by broadcasting information via the radio. Information about age restrictions can also be included in training sessions for government forces. In addition, NGO coalitions, networks of child protection groups, and other

umbrella bodies can be useful avenues through which to disseminate information on recruitment prevention. Religious groups — both individual congregations and national-level bodies such as multi-religious bodies — can be powerful allies in conveying recruitment prevention messages, given their wide reach and moral authority.

Recruitment prevention education should be emphasized particularly in schools and in refugee camps in or near conflict zones. This education can also be useful in schools and camps throughout a country affected by armed conflict. Teachers, schoolmasters, and camp administrators and staff should be trained in issues related to child protection and preventing recruitment; they should take responsibility for educating the children with whom they work on the issue.

### **Community-based initiatives to prevent recruitment**

Prevention of recruitment should also be emphasized in work of almost any nature with communities in areas that are war-affected or where an outbreak of conflict is likely. In addition to broad public education campaigns focused on recruitment prevention, SC and its partners can work with community leaders and organizations to identify and reinforce traditional mechanisms for protection of children — especially children at risk — from recruitment and other exploitation. It may be advisable initially to facilitate community dialogue and consensus-building around issues of who should be protected from participation in conflict and how this should be done.

Prevention of recruitment of children may also be included as part of broad programs of peace promotion and peace education programs. People who can play key roles in preventing recruitment through community-based approaches include religious leaders, health outreach workers and other government extension workers, teachers, local human rights organizations, and former child soldiers themselves.

### **Facilitating birth registration and proof of age**

Children are more vulnerable to recruitment if they are unable to prove that their age is below the legal limit for recruitment. It is vital to ensure that all children have records of their birth. It is necessary to issue identity documents containing birth date to children who have lost them. It is also important to register births in camps for refugees and the displaced.

### **Facilitating family reunification or foster family**

Orphanages and other institutions where large numbers of children without family protection are gathered are very attractive to recruiters and are often targeted for raids. Save the Children promotes community-based options for the care of separated children and orphans, and recommends that foster families or small peer group homes should be identified in order to provide more appropriate protection of children from a variety of threats, including recruitment or abduction.<sup>6</sup>

### **Expanding opportunities for alternatives to combat service**

A range of initiatives intended to assist children in war-affected communities can contribute to the prevention of recruitment, as well as to the reintegration of former child soldiers. Micro-lending and vocational training initiatives can enable young people to support themselves so that they do not have to turn to armed groups for survival. These types of activities provide children and youth with the opportunity to develop new skills, form a positive self-identity, and make positive choices about their future, and are critical to the prevention of recruitment. Youth clubs and structured recreation activities can overcome marginalized children's isolation and strengthen their self-esteem. These and other initiatives are discussed at length in the Programming Options section of this field guide. Such programs are not usually implemented solely for the purpose of preventing recruitment, but in well-designed programs this will be among one of the most important outcomes.

### **Advocacy**

Advocacy for action that prevents recruitment of children into armed groups should be undertaken at local, national, and international levels. Advocacy priorities that SC and its partners can pursue include:

- Securing protection for camps, schools, and other sites where children stay (by volunteers, UN forces, or others as appropriate).
- Ensuring that camps for refugees and internally displaced persons are established at a reasonable distance from borders and conflict zones in order to reduce the likelihood of raids on the camps by recruiters.
- Preventing infiltration of camps by armed groups.
- Encouraging all parties to a conflict to adopt relevant international legal instruments regarding child soldiers (See Section II for a summary of these). This is important not only in countries in the midst of conflict, but also in countries where conflict is likely to occur.

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<sup>6</sup>For further discussion of identification and reunification, refer to the *Field Guide to Separated Children Programs in Emergencies* by J. Williamson in this series.

- Ensuring that both government forces and opposition forces adhere to the age restrictions for recruiting to which they have agreed.
- Working with authorities to establish a universal system of birth registration and ensuring that this system and other means of documenting and proving age are in place and functioning.
- Advocating with governments to enact and enforce restrictions or bans on the trade in lightweight weapons.

SC and its partners can play a role (leading or supportive) in negotiations with the government and with opposition forces to release child soldiers. SC and its partners can also play a role (leading or supportive) in monitoring and documenting recruitment practices and sharing the documentation with those who can use it to pressure the groups that are recruiting.

Toward these ends, SC and its partners may seek to form advocacy alliances and networks with other civil society organizations: religious groups, human rights organizations (international and national), multi-lateral organizations, etc. In addition, SC and its partners may advocate with donor governments that can influence policy.

### ***Demobilization and other forms of disengagement***

Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of soldiers from an armed group, but it is only one of many ways in which child soldiers will disengage from participation in an armed group. Many child soldiers do not go through a formal demobilization process at all and may escape or simply leave the armed group when the conflict ends.

The ways that children disengage from participation in an armed group include:

- Capture by an opposing force or by a peacekeeping force
- Surrender
- Handover as part of political negotiations
- Abandonment by armed group — because of injury, criticism of the practice of using child soldiers
- Desertion or escape from the armed group

Child soldiers who leave an armed group through any of these avenues may report or be brought to a demobilization site where they go through the formal demobilization process. However, they may also return directly to their homes, may approach families or institutions in the area, or may travel to an urban area.

In some instances, demobilization is planned and SC and other agencies can make preparations for it. But in other cases, demobilization occurs spontaneously. It is important for SC staff to be flexible, responsive, and as prepared as possible for contingencies.

### **THE PROCESS OF DEMOBILIZATION**

The demobilization process should be as short as practical. The emphasis should be on reunification with families and communities, because this expedites the child's reintegration into society. Chances of re-recruitment may also be reduced when children are in families and communities rather than residing together in large facilities. However, children should not be returned to communities where fighting is still underway or likely to re-ignite.

The need to reintegrate former child soldiers quickly should be weighed against the need for both children and communities to prepare for reintegration. Ensuring the child's protection and best interests must be the top priority. If children, families, and communities are not fully prepared, former child soldiers may face harsh retaliation upon returning to their home; if communities are not involved in the reintegration process, they may also face retaliation by operatives of the armed group that they left.

The demobilization process is usually coordinated by a UN agency, peacekeeping force or interim administration. It is important for SC staff to build collaboration with this agency and with all organizations involved in the process to prevent gaps in service and to promote continuity of care and support for ex-child soldiers. SC often plays a key role in raising awareness of child soldiers' concerns and facilitating communication among organizations involved with child soldiers and/or children affected by armed conflict.

Some countries have no formal demobilization process. In those that do, each process is unique. A typical demobilization process has three main stages:

1. Reception centers/demobilization sites
2. Interim care centers (only for children usually)
3. Permanent reintegration

A child soldier most often enters the process through a reception center or demobilization site. Some child soldiers skip the interim care center stage and go directly from a demobilization site to permanent reintegration on their own. However, SC experience shows that reintegration without external support can be extremely difficult for child soldiers and for their communities. Attention should be given to ensuring that children spend at least some time in a center where their return home or entry into independent life can be prepared and facilitated to ensure their own protection and long-term reintegration.

### **1. Reception centers/demobilization sites**

Reception centers and demobilization sites are intended as a brief initial stopover for all combatants-adults and children-in the demobilization process. A UN agency, a peace-keeping force, or the government may administer reception centers and demobilization sites. Reception centers are usually smaller facilities in outlying areas, open only during the day. Demobilization sites are usually larger facilities where demobilized combatants may stay overnight.

At these facilities, combatants are registered and disarmed. Adults may receive medical assessment and care if necessary, and sometimes a 'demobilization benefit package' that may include food, seeds, tools, or other support for economic reintegration. Adults are then usually free to leave.

At all stages of the demobilization process, children must be separated from adults, and arrangements must be made to ensure the protection of girls and young women.

Services should target the specific needs of girls and boys including:

- Assessment of physical (including reproductive) and mental health
- Provision of basic medical care needed and referral for more extensive care required
- Initial social worker screening and counseling
- Feeding
- Recreation

The goal of these centers is to facilitate a rupture with military life for ex-soldiers. For children, it is especially important to separate them from their former leaders and authority structures in the armed groups. In some instances, adult commanders in the demobilization site may resist separation from child soldiers who they claim to be 'family.' Thus clear

policies should be developed and consistently applied to prevent breaking up actual families while separating children from commanders that wish to maintain control over them.

The time that children spend in the initial demobilization center should be limited to the briefest time necessary for screening and urgent medical care. In most cases, this can be done in 48 hours before the child is transferred to supportive environment such as an interim care center to begin the reintegration process. Reunification with a child's own family/community is preferable if the child and family/community are prepared, but in most cases children and their families will require some time to prepare the return. Agencies should place a child in an interim care center if:

- The child's family has not yet been identified and traced.
- The child's family or community needs to be prepared before receiving the child.
- The child needs special attention and care for her/his physical or psychological health.
- The child is unwilling to return home immediately.
- The area where a child's family lives remains dangerous

## **2. Interim care centers**

Normal life for the child soldier is best re-established within the family and community. However, circumstances may require that children be cared for in some form of group center. It is, nevertheless, important to state that any form of institutionalization should be seen as a last resort that would be implemented only in exceptional circumstances.

Those involved in implementing such care should ensure that the message sent to the children is that this is a temporary measure, not a long-term alternative to family reunification. They should also seek to establish daily routines that reflect the roles and responsibilities that children would acquire within family life: that is, avoid 'institutionalizing' the children. Children should be involved in establishing these routines, but also in setting common standards for their own behavior and how behavior should be regulated within the group, in order to learn constructive strategies for dealing with conflict and aggression.

Contact with the local community should be encouraged, and activities should be implemented which promote mutual acceptance and understanding. Sports and cultural activities, for example, can help the children feel connected to the local community. At the same time, these activities can help community members see the child soldiers as children and reduce community members' apprehension and misgivings. In the same way that the

children set standards for their behavior within the group, behavior standards should also be discussed with the local community, particularly where there is likely to be considerable contact. Expectations from both sides should be discussed, and sanctions for misdemeanors should be mutually agreed upon.

Most centers choose not to separate child soldiers from non-soldier children. They also seek to de-emphasize differences and to provide all children the same basic services in order to prevent resentment and stigmatization. Child soldiers and other children who have experienced extreme trauma may receive more intensive psychosocial support.

Interim care centers are often managed by a NGO with support from and coordination with the UN and other agencies that provide a range of reintegration services to children. Rather than large institutions, interim care centers can be developed as small groups of children living within a structured environment close to the place they will be reintegrating. This approach will allow the child and family to visit each other frequently and receive the kind of support they need to help adjust to a permanent return home.

Most interim care centers are residential, although day centers may also be a viable option for some situations. Others are open only during the day, with children staying nearby at night in a foster home, small group home, camp, or other setting. It is important to take precautions to protect girls. There may be separate centers for girls and boys, separate sleeping quarters, or other arrangements required to meet protection needs.

It is important that interim care centers do not become permanent childcare institutions. Centers should be simple rather than resource-rich, so that children and their families do not see the center as a long-term option with better services than in their own community. Instead, the focus of the reintegration process should be on improving the availability of education, vocational training, health care, and other key services in the communities where children are being reintegrated.

Although most experts recommend that children stay in care centers for a minimum duration, up to two months, circumstances often make it difficult to find appropriate permanent placements for children quickly. It may prove difficult to locate families and prepare them for the child's return, or children may require medical treatment which prevents them from returning to their homes.

In instances when children are unable to be reintegrated into a community within a short timeframe, provision of additional services (e.g. basic education, training, etc.) can be considered at the interim care center.

Centers are responsible for the protection of children. Each center must have adequate security to protect them from attacks or efforts at forced recruitment. Performing community outreach and educating the community on the importance of interim care centers will help to prevent this kind of attack and anger. Center staff must be prepared to move quickly in times of emergency and need to have contingency plans for various threats that may arise. Possible threats include attempts at mass abduction of children by a fighting force or attack by area residents angered by atrocities allegedly committed by child soldiers.

### **3. Long-term placement and reintegration**

Interim care centers are short-term options with the long-term goal of reunifying children with their families and integrating them socially and economically back into their community. Most children need some help in reintegrating, especially if they have been with the armed groups more than 6 months. Experience has indicated that the longer a child is in an armed group, the harder it is to break with that lifestyle, requiring more assistance and support. This process is discussed in more depth in the later section on reintegration.

### **PROGRAMMING OPTIONS**

SC can play a role in each of the stages of the demobilization process. This section discusses programming roles that SC can play in reception centers/demobilization sites and in interim care centers. If no demobilization sites or interim care centers exist in your context, interim care centers may need to be established if there is a demonstrated need.

#### **Reception centers/demobilization sites**

In reception centers and at demobilization sites, SC can often play a role in providing or training social workers to undertake initial screening of child soldiers in these facilities. Social workers at this stage will first identify child soldiers, and then assess their specific needs and placement possibilities. The screening process will allow social workers to determine which children can be immediately reunified with their families, and which children require interim care during family tracing or arrangement of foster homes.

An important role for social workers in these facilities is to identify especially vulnerable children in need of specialized care and to make arrangements for the care they require. Especially vulnerable child soldiers include:

- Children with disabilities
- Girl soldiers, in particular those returning with children of their own
- Children suffering from alcohol or drug dependency
- Children with psychological problems caused by, or exacerbated by, their experiences
- Girls who have physical or emotional problems as a result of sexual abuse and/or exploitation

During these screenings, social workers should avoid unnecessary documentation of children's military life and war experience, *as this information could later be used against the children*. To protect child soldiers from retaliation, social workers should also seek to ensure the confidentiality of information that is collected. Children's confidentiality in these situations must be prioritized in order to maintain children's trust and ensure their long-term protection.

Another role for SC is to transport child soldiers from demobilization sites/reception centers to interim care centers. However, the possible danger of this task must be recognized and planned for. If SC takes on this task, all necessary security measures must be taken to protect the children and staff.

SC may seek to play an active role in the protection of children on-site. This can include a range of activities such as ensuring that children are separated from adults and that males and females are separated, as well as advocating for appropriate protection from recruitment or retaliation. If there are difficulties in transporting children to care centers in a short amount of time, SC can also initiate activities to start psychosocial recovery at the demobilization center, such as structured activities, recreation, and documentation/tracing for children seeking to be reunified with their families.

### **Interim care centers**

SC's role in an interim care center for child soldiers and other unaccompanied children is especially important. In a given situation, SC may consider a variety of activities including:

- Management of one or more centers, or building the capacity of one or more local partners to do so.
- Provision of psychosocial support including structured activities and community-based reintegration activities.
- Coordination of efforts among multiple partners working at a single center or among partners working at multiple centers.
- Family tracing and reunification.<sup>7</sup>

Based on the situational assessment and reintegration needs of child soldiers, SC can also provide certain services in the centers as part of a coordinated multi-agency arrangement. These services are usually begun through a combination of direct implementation and support to local organizations that eventually take the lead on programs within their community. Services may be provided at the center and available only to the children of the center, or they may be provided off-site in the surrounding community and be available to both children of the center and community members. Each situation must be carefully assessed to determine the best approach. See Box 4.1 for an example of Save the Children's programming in Liberia.

SC's core sectors of activities provide a menu of services that can be designed to support the reintegration of former child combatants. Special attention and long-term follow-up activities should target child soldiers at particular risk, such as pregnant girls, children with children of their own, children with disabilities, or children with substance abuse problems. Creating long-term follow-up programming for these children is critical to their successful reintegration.

#### **BOX 4.1: INTERIM CARE CENTERS: THE LIBERIAN EXAMPLE**

Save the Children (UK) in its work with former child soldiers in Liberia places great emphasis on this aspect of interim care, where daily activities are designed to give structure to the children's lives. The children help with the maintenance and repair of their centers. This instills a pride in their surroundings, and a sense of responsibility for their own environment. In the course of these activities, they also acquire skills such as carpentry and roofing that are useful in later life. They grow their own vegetable plots, giving children a sense of achievement and pride in their efforts, and encouraging them to work together and help each other achieve a common goal.

*Source: The Child Soldiers Module of the Action for the Rights of Children Series, UNHCR and the International Save the Children Alliance. The Module is included on the CD-ROM accompanying this guide.*

<sup>7</sup>For further discussion of family tracing and reunification, refer to the *Field Guide to Separated Children Programs in Emergencies* by J. Williamson in this series.

### **Advocacy for demobilization**

During demobilization SC has a significant role to play with local, national, and international partners to pursue a number of advocacy priorities related to demobilization of child soldiers, including:

- Working with state and non-state actors to encourage demobilization itself
- Working with all relevant parties engaged in demobilization to ensure that child-oriented policies and procedures for demobilization are developed and implemented so that children's protection is ensured and children's needs and concerns are addressed

### ***Reintegration***

Facilitating the effective social reintegration is SC's principal goal in child soldier programming. After being demobilized, most child soldiers simply want to return to a normal life. Helping these children to become healthy, productive members of communities is not only in the children's best interests, but also in the best interests of society. If former child soldiers are not successfully reintegrated, they are at risk of being re-recruited, living on the streets, engaging in criminal activity to support themselves, and finding coping mechanisms that can cause lasting harm to society.

Most child soldiers have been separated from their families for prolonged periods of time. The challenge faced by child soldiers is compounded by the harsh experiences and conditions of life they faced as soldiers. These children need to be able to establish and maintain stable emotional relationships. It is important to re-establish continuity of care, nurturing and support for ex-child soldiers as well as develop predictable patterns and structures in order to normalize their daily lives. Family reunification and the re-establishment of emotional bonds are at the core of a successful return to normal life and effective social reintegration.

As a general rule, SC should prioritize reintegration with families and communities as quickly as is safe and acceptable to the ex-child soldier and to the community. However, it is important to recognize that the ex-child soldier may need time in an interim care center to adjust to civilian life and to recover — physically as well as psychologically — from the trauma and hardships of their involvement in armed conflict. Eventually, the community may require time to prepare for the return of children who have been exploited and abused and may have abused others, including some members of the child's own family or community.

The challenge is to find a balance: reunifying children with their communities as soon as possible but not sooner than the children or communities can handle.

In planning reintegration initiatives, SC staff should be aware of the factors that may make it difficult for a community to accept child soldiers. These include:

- Suspicion of, anger at, and fear of former child soldiers by community members — because of what the child soldiers have actually done or are believed to have done.
- Dislike for the aggressive or violent behavior sometimes displayed by recently returned child soldiers.
- Disapproval of the substance abuse problems that some children may have.
- Shame felt by community members because they were unable to protect the children from recruitment.
- Poverty of community members, aggravated by the war, leading them to feel that they have few resources with which to support returning child soldiers.

SC staff developing reintegration programming should also be aware of the factors that may make child soldiers reluctant to returning home, including these:

- Children may be ashamed of what they did and feel extreme guilt.
- Children may fear revenge attacks — by raiders or by community members themselves.
- Children may fear future re-recruitment.
- Children who previously exercised authority in positions of responsibility within an armed group may have a difficult time coping with the loss of authority.
- Children must become accustomed to new relationships in which they do not possess the same power; they may have a difficult time conforming to expected norms and rules in households, schools, and elsewhere.
- Children may miss the camaraderie of the armed groups and former role models.
- Children may have served for so long with an armed group that it may be difficult to relinquish that identity and assume a new identity.

Children should be actively involved in all decisions concerning their future. This involvement can improve their senses of personal control and self-worth. A high priority in all reintegration efforts for child soldiers should be to promote children's self-esteem and their sense of hope and confidence in the future.

It may not be possible to reintegrate all child soldiers into their home families and communities. The alternatives to family reunification are discussed below.

## PROGRAMMING OPTIONS

This section discusses the multiple ways that SC can contribute to the social reintegration of child soldiers in four categories. Program designers and managers may choose to undertake action in one or more of these categories, based on the particular circumstances in the country context.

All reintegration programs need to consider the issue of target group. In most instances, it is recommended that assistance be provided not only for child soldiers, but for all children most affected by the conflict in a location. This is intended to prevent stigmatization and resentment towards child soldiers and to avoid the perception that former soldiers receive rewards for having fought. For a more extensive discussion of targeting child soldier programming, see the section *“Determining the intended beneficiary group(s)”* later in this chapter.

### Program managers should consider four program areas in reintegration activities:

- Arranging a living situation
- Facilitating community acceptance, reconciliation, and care
- Strengthening the capacity of ex-soldiers and other war-affected children to sustain themselves
- Promoting development in communities into which child soldiers and other separated children are reintegrated

### 1. Arranging a living situation

This service can be provided only for child soldiers or for all separated and unaccompanied children. SC can directly implement the tasks described below or can provide training and technical support to other organizations for the tasks.

Children must be consulted about where they wish to live, and must be active participants in the decision-making process. Child soldiers have often developed a sense of independence and are unlikely to stay in a situation they do not like. Some children will want to live on their own or with another family rather than returning home. Some will want to stay in urban areas; others will seek to return to rural areas. Some may want to start a new life anonymously, while others will wish to be reunited with their families and communities. In all cases, it is important to determine why the child may not want to return home and why she or he may wish to find a different living situation. In building a trusting relationship

with the child, SC staff will be able to determine if the child feels overwhelmed, making it difficult for them to return home. SC may be able to help a child overcome these emotional obstacles through appropriate interventions.

Many children who wish to be reunified with their own families may not know their families' whereabouts. In these instances, it is necessary for SC or a partner to undertake family tracing. It is important to search widely for family. Often, parents or extended family members willing to care for children are found, even when children think they are orphaned. For children who have no known family members (or family members who are willing to take them in) and for children who do not wish to return to their own family, SC or a partner agency should arrange foster family placements.<sup>8</sup> When possible, SC staff should work closely with family and community members to determine the biological or foster family placement that will be best for the child.

In some cases, children returning to either a biological or a foster family are provided with 'homecoming kits' of agricultural inputs or tools in order to help family efforts to support all household members. It is important to limit the size of the kit as large kits can create an incentive for a child to briefly rejoin an armed group (or be forcibly re-enlisted by an adult), so the child can drop out again and receive another kit.

Some ex-child soldiers will not wish to be placed in either a biological or foster family. These children, usually older adolescents, may wish to stay with other children with whom they have formed strong bonds. In this instance, SC or its partners may arrange for small group homes of about three to six former child soldiers (perhaps also including unaccompanied children). The children in these homes should be actively supervised and cared for by the surrounding community. SC or other parties may hire a 'house mother' to supervise and support the young people in these homes. These children are often linked to vocational training or apprenticeship programs. Group homes and other innovative alternatives to traditional family placement can help keep older ex-child soldiers off the streets and out of the armed. Institutionalization of children in orphanages or like facilities should only be considered as a last resort, and then only as a temporary measure until a permanent non-institutional arrangement can be made.

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<sup>8</sup>For further discussion of this topic, refer to the *Field Guide to Separated Children Programs in Emergencies* by J. Williamson in this series.

## **2. Facilitating community acceptance, reconciliation, and care**

Community outreach to facilitate reconciliation and reintegration are usually undertaken within the context of a larger child protection campaign for all war-affected children. Although these activities are integrated into post-conflict recovery programs, there is also a need to specifically focus on former child soldiers, as there are issues around their return to communities that can present significant challenges.

For the reasons discussed above, it may prove difficult for communities to fully accept children who have served in armed groups. SC and its partners can undertake a variety of actions to promote this acceptance.

At the national level, SC has supported outreach activities to sensitize the general population to issues of child protection, with a special focus on child soldiers and reintegration. Radio is usually the medium with the widest reach in most war-affected countries, although posters, traveling dramas, and other forms of raising awareness may be useful. SC can also engage in advocacy efforts with prominent national leaders in government, religion, arts, sports, and other areas. SC should provide these leaders with clear messages about accepting and caring for former child soldiers and suggest ways that the leaders can share those messages with their constituents or supporters. Churches, mosques, temples, and other religious institutions are especially good partners in conveying messages of compassion for ex-child soldiers.

At the community level, SC can work directly with communities or can support and build the capacity of partners to work with communities to facilitate community acceptance, reconciliation, and care for ex-child soldiers. In communities that are reluctant to accept child soldiers, SC may need to play a mediating role before any of these children return.

SC and its local partners may start by facilitating meetings with political, religious, traditional leaders, and community committees to discuss the reintegration of child soldiers. In these initial meetings, the focus should be on listening to the concerns of community members and identifying how these concerns can be addressed. Once trust has been built, discussion can then turn to both the short-term strategy for reunification (usually some form of public acceptance ceremony) and the long-term strategy for effective reintegration (usually involving community-based psychosocial support).

In discussions with community leaders and members, it is important to learn about traditional practices and patterns in the community that facilitate reintegration and psychosocial healing. SC and their partners may choose to work with community leaders to develop a process of formal acceptance and return into the community for child soldiers. This process may include acknowledgment of inappropriate behavior, public apology, forgiveness, and traditional cleansing rituals. For an example of this process, see Box 4.2 in this section.

Reunification of children with families is only the first step in a long process of full social reintegration. Work will have to continue to follow up on the situation of the child in the community, and outreach activities will need to continue with community leaders to promote reconciliation within the community. Reconciliation may be necessary between adults and children, between members of opposing forces, and between victims and victimizers. While fostering reconciliation is difficult and requires a significant investment of time and energy, it can help prevent the future outbreak of damaging conflicts in the community.

In the medium to long term, SC should work to build the capacity of community leaders and members to provide community-based psychosocial support to former child soldiers and other war-affected children. SC and its partners have developed training curricula and provide trainers, training materials, and ongoing technical support for this capacity building. Appropriate candidates for training include teachers, religious leaders, and traditional healers.

Psychosocial support can take many forms, with a focus on structured recreation activities that include sports and games, dancing, music, drawing and other art, theater, story telling, and other forms of group recreation. These activities provide a physical and emotional space for children to relieve tension, express emotion, learn appropriate modes of interacting with others, and come to terms with their past experiences and present situation. These programs often have a strong component of peer support and may involve older children and youth as mentors for younger children. Other forms of psychosocial care include support groups and counseling. In many instances, ex-child soldiers who were initially aggressive and even violent immediately after they returned to a community settled down when they were granted acceptance and given firm guidance and some psychosocial support.<sup>9</sup>

While these types of programming are successful, implementing organizations should be careful not to underestimate the trauma and significant stressors that children have faced,

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<sup>9</sup>For further discussion of this topic, refer to the *Field Guide to Psychosocial Programs in Emergencies* by J. Williamson in this series.

#### **BOX 4.2: TRADITIONAL MECHANISMS FOR REINTEGRATION OF CHILD SOLDIERS: THE CASE OF MOZAMBIQUE**

During the long civil war in Mozambique, Save the Children and other organizations worked closely with Mozambican communities to reintegrate former child soldiers. Many communities used traditional mechanisms to facilitate the child's transition from the life of a soldier to the life of a child in the family and community. A SC report explains one such mechanism:

*According to local practices, the children are submitted to traditional rituals and ceremonies in order to treat emotional problems. Through these ceremonies, ancestors are thanked and praised for having protected the children and enabled them to return home. The ancestors are also asked to purify and forgive the children for the wrongs committed during their absence, to calm their spirits, and to purify their families. At the same time, the children are reintroduced to the leaders of the village, who welcome them and promise to help the family.*

Miguel Mause reports a similar mechanism in another Mozambican community:

*The ritual...was really a necessity for the reintegration of the individual in the family and community group, as, at least under RENAMO [the rebel force], those individuals who were kidnapped would undergo a ritual of "breaking the bonds" with their social group. [Former child soldiers] related how they had to commit crimes within their own families, so that they would erase any bonding links from them and would acquire a new personality.*

*Boaventura Macova, a "nyanga" [traditional healer] who was then secretary of the Mozambican Association of Traditional Healers, describes the ritual of reintegration of a child involved in the war: "As soon as the child arrived home she was taken to the "ndomba" [house of the spirits] to be introduced to the ancestors. There the elder in the family addressed the ancestors, informing them that the grandchild had returned home. At the same time the grandfather thanked the ancestors for the fact that the child was alive and had returned to the family."*

After this reception ritual, a purification ritual was conducted.

*"We took the child to the bush, where we built a small reed hut. There we put the child, dressed in the dirty and torn clothes that she had brought from the base of the rebels. Afterwards we set fire to the hut. The child already knew that she should get undressed and get out of the hut the minute it started burning...Afterwards, the child inhaled the smoke of some roots which were burned, and she bathed in water mixed with powdered roots as a medicine. Later at the "ndomba" the child was "vaccinated" using "kuthalavela" [a method by which small incisions are made on the wrists, tongue, and chest, and a medicinal paste is smeared on these incisions.]" Following this ritual, the former child soldier was accepted into the family and community and was able to speak about and eventually recover from her experiences with RENAMO.*

Sources:

Save the Children Federation. 1995. *Children and War: The Mozambique Experience*. (Westport, CT: Save the Children Federation)

Mause, Miguel. October 1998. *The Social Reintegration of the Child Involved in Armed Conflict in Mozambique*. (Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies.)

particularly if they have been in armed groups for a long time. Programs should be prepared to deal with the severe shock that children will go through in leaving that environment, manifesting in nightmares, social rejection and extreme anti-social behavior. Interim care centers need to help children first come to terms with the change in their environment, and then provide longer-term support to families to help these children deal with challenges that may surface in the future such as violent behavior.

### **3. Strengthening the educational and economic capacity of ex-soldiers**

As SC or its partners are arranging permanent living situations for child soldiers, they should also begin considering the follow up interventions after placement that will enable the ex-soldiers to sustain themselves in the long term such as education and economic opportunities. SC may implement these interventions directly, support and enable local partners to do so, or link with other NGOs' initiatives. It may be possible for a SC child soldier program to link with another SC program to implement several of these interventions.

In cases where former child soldiers have been reintegrated into a community, these interventions should usually be targeted at the most affected and vulnerable children in the community. In many war-affected communities, this can effectively mean all children in the community. When ex-child soldiers are living in urban settings — in small group homes, as part of foster families, or on their own — it may be appropriate to target some of these initiatives specifically for the child soldiers. However, it is important to avoid stigmatizing child soldiers or engendering resentment against them because they are receiving benefits that other children are not receiving.

Many child soldiers have had limited or no access to formal education because they were recruited at an early age or they were required to work to support their families rather than attending school. Also, in many areas conflict disrupted schooling for all children by destroying school buildings, removing teachers, halting distribution of materials, etc. And many child soldiers have never had the opportunity to learn skills other than those required for fighting and surviving in an armed group. These skills alone do not enable children to earn a legitimate income in the long term. If former child soldiers are to be prevented from returning to the use of force to secure a livelihood, they need support for lawful income generation.

In addition to helping children prepare for their future, education and economic opportunities can have a range of psychosocial benefits for former child soldiers and other war-affected children.<sup>10</sup>

- These initiatives help normalize children's lives.
- The structure and predictability of organized schooling and skill-building initiatives can help children to overcome their experiences and develop an identity separate from that of a soldier.
- These types of programs give the children a sense of security and stability and improve their self-esteem and their hope for the future.
- The regular participation and retention of children, and particularly adolescents, in these programs is essential to their effectiveness and success.
- If children face difficulties in their home, these initiatives should be an alternative setting within which they feel valued and supported.
- Certain psychosocial interventions can be incorporated directly within education or livelihoods programs (e.g. structured recreation activities, support groups.)

### **Education initiatives**

Most child soldiers have not had the opportunity to acquire basic educational skills. During the demobilization process, many say that returning to school and learning to read and write is their first priority. There are a range of initiatives that can be considered to improve education for child soldiers and other war-affected children. SC should select the initiatives to support based on a variety of factors, including what is most appropriate and necessary in each context, what other organizations are already doing, and what SC or its partners can do most effectively. In some cases, SC should work towards expanding access to existing education opportunities, stressing that former child soldiers should be included in these efforts. In other cases, SC may consider developing targeted education activities to work with child soldiers and their youth peer group through non-formal or semi-formal educational activities.<sup>11</sup>

### **Economic opportunities initiatives**

Within the reintegration phase, most ex-child soldiers wish to learn income-generating skills that will allow them to be financially independent. SC and its partners should consider a variety of initiatives to expand the economic opportunities of child soldiers and other war-affected children. Certain schemes such as apprenticeships can be especially

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<sup>10</sup>For further discussion, refer to the *Field Guide to Youth Programs in Emergencies* by M. Sommers in this series.

<sup>11</sup>For further discussion, refer to the *Field Guide to Education Programs in Emergencies* by C. Triplehorn in this series.

supportive for children as it not only provides them with new skills and opportunities for earning their living, but also because they can form strong, positive relationships with adult role models.

#### **4. Promoting development in communities to foster reintegration**

An important way to support the successful social reintegration of child soldiers is to strengthen the communities that absorb these children. Poverty, lack of opportunity, reduced productivity due to ill health, and other economic factors often are among the root causes of children's vulnerability to recruitment by armed groups. By addressing the fundamental development challenges that households and communities face, SC and its partners can thus help prevent future recruitment as well as promote social reintegration.

There is a wide range of interventions to promote community development in war-affected areas. SC may implement these interventions directly, support and enable local partners to do so, or link with other NGOs' initiatives. It may be possible for a SC child soldiers program to link with another SC program to implement several of these interventions. SC should integrate assistance activities wherever possible to increase its programmatic scope and effectiveness. In most instances, it is recommended that the target group for these interventions is not just the households that have absorbed ex-child soldiers but all vulnerable households or the community as a whole.

Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) have become very popular in many post-conflict environments and are good examples of programs that can be adapted to encourage reintegration and rehabilitation, since they focus on rebuilding damaged schools, clinics, bridges, roads, and other public facilities. The projects provide income or food-for-work to community members, provide younger community members with an opportunity to learn construction skills, and can foster a sense of shared responsibility for and contribution to community reconstruction. A key role for SC staff may be to advocate with other agencies (the World Bank, UN agencies, donors, other NGOs, etc.) to target community development projects to areas where child soldiers are being reintegrated.

Integrating child soldiers into communities that are struggling to recover from conflict and displacement can be a challenging undertaking. Flexibility, creativity, and innovation are essential tools in responding to local priorities and developing interventions to promote community development in war-affected areas.



## V. PROGRAMMING PROCESS

This part of the field guide is not intended to offer a full overview of the programming process. Rather, it is intended to highlight key considerations in each step of programming to orient the process to examine the specific needs of child soldiers.

### SITUATION ASSESSMENT

A situation assessment may be undertaken to focus specifically on child soldiers, or child soldiers may be one of several protection concerns that the assessment is meant to cover. The main purpose of the situation assessment is to identify priorities and gather the information necessary for program design and strategic planning.

#### *Key tasks in a child soldiers situation assessment*

The key tasks in a situation assessment to inform the design and management of a child soldier program are the following:

1. Determine the nature and extent of the use of child soldiers in the conflict.
2. Identify key contextual factors, opportunities, and constraints.
3. Identify existing responses and gaps.
4. Identify potential programming partners.
5. Determine SC capacity and requirements.

#### **1. DETERMINE THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE CHILD SOLDIERS CHALLENGE**

- How many child soldiers are estimated to still be in armed groups?
- How many child soldiers have left the armed groups? Through what channel/s did they leave? How many of them have been reintegrated into durable settings? How many are still in demobilization camps or other facilities?
- How many child soldiers can be expected to leave or be released from the armed groups in the next month, 3 months, 6 months, 12 months?
- What is the physical and psychosocial condition of most children leaving the armed groups?
- What was the range of children's experiences? Were children routinely forced to commit atrocities themselves or did they mainly witness violence?

- Was the conflict in which child soldiers were involved perceived to be just or unjust, against a clear oppressor or senseless?
- Were the child soldiers in constant fear of arbitrary treatment or was discipline consistent?
- What were the economic rewards, both those that child soldiers were promised and those they actually enjoyed?
- Does a peace treaty exist? Are child soldiers recognized it? If so, what provisions are made for them?
- What are the current social norms and perceptions concerning child soldiers? How might these be influenced?

## **2. IDENTIFY KEY CONTEXTUAL FACTORS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CONSTRAINTS**

- Is the conflict over nationwide, or is it still continuing in all or part of the country? Which parts?
- If the conflict is continuing, what are the prospects for a ceasefire or other cessation of hostilities?
- Where is it safe to travel? To establish demobilization sites and interim care centers? To reintegrate children into communities?
- If the conflict has ended, what are the perceptions of victor and vanquished?
- Are/were ethnic or socio-economic inequalities a dimension of the conflict? Are these addressed in a peace treaty?
- What is the extent of economic devastation and the destruction of basic infrastructure?
- What are the dynamics of internal and external displacement and the impact on traditional community networks and coping mechanisms?

## **3. IDENTIFY EXISTING RESPONSES AND GAPS**

- What government policies and programs apply to child soldiers, and what agencies and individuals are responsible for these policies? Are the policies and programs being implemented? If so, with what effect? Is strengthening required?
- What NGOs (national and international) are involved in child soldiers programming, where do they operate, and what approaches do they use? Which approaches have worked, which have not, and why?
- What NGOs are implementing activities that could be productively linked to child soldiers programs? (e.g. emergency education, vocational training, agricultural assistance, etc.)
- What religious organizations are active, and what assistance are they providing to child soldiers and other war-affected children?

- What other organizations are assisting child soldiers, and what are they doing?
- What work to assist child soldiers is NOT being done? Where could SC contribute?

#### **4. IDENTIFY POTENTIAL PROGRAMMING PARTNERS**

- Which of the above organizations can SC work with to develop and implement a child soldiers program? What role would each play? (Examples: SC could strengthen government capacity to implement relevant policies; SC could contract capable local NGOs or religious organizations to serve as implementing partners for a program; SC could link its child soldiers program with services provided by another NGO, etc.)

#### **5. DETERMINE SC CAPACITY AND REQUIREMENTS**

- Does SC have the capacity to design and implement a child soldiers program in the country?
- If not, can SC build this capacity in the timeframe necessary?
- What resources (human, financial, logistical, etc.) are needed? Can these resources be secured in the country? From abroad? How and when?

### ***Sources of information for a child soldiers situation assessment***

The information sought in a child soldier situation assessment can be gathered at multiple levels: international, national, and local. At the *international level*, good sources of information include donor agency staff, government officials such as the U.S. State Department, staff of other NGOs, journalists, and others familiar with the situation. Much of this information can be gathered informally by SC headquarters and passed along to field staff.

At the *national level* in a country affected by conflict, potential good sources of information include staff of:

- Donor agencies
- International NGOs
- National/local NGOs
- National/local religious organizations
- National government, if functioning and approachable. Particularly relevant ministries to approach include those responsible for children and youth, welfare and development, disarmament and demobilization, and reconstruction and rehabilitation.

At *local level*, potential sources of information include:

- Community political leaders — both elected and traditional.
- Community religious leaders — from multiple denominations/faiths if present.
- Local government officials — from all relevant departments.
- Business leaders — particularly those that are respected and known for their community involvement.
- Care leaders — people who play an active role in providing care for children.
- Teachers and directors of schools, clinics, etc.
- Former child soldiers and other war-affected children.
- The parents/relatives/neighbors who have taken in former child soldiers and those whose children are with (or thought to be with) the armed groups.

Two of the most common approaches to gathering information at local level are key informant interviews and focus groups. Key informant interviews are used to gain the insights of individual community leaders on a broad range of topics. Focus groups are typically helpful for exploring certain topics in depth with a limited number (7-10) of community members.

In individual interviews, focus groups, and all other discussions at local level, SC staff should be careful to avoid raising expectations that will be disappointed. SC staff should also be prepared to face resistance resulting from the frustration many communities feel with assessment teams that arrive, gather information, and are never seen again. Interviewers need to be respectful, candid, and open about why the information is being sought, how it will be used, and what may result.

## **IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL DONORS**

A SC child soldiers program will often be strongly shaped by the availability and sources of funding for the program. Thus one of the most important initial steps in the child soldiers programming process is identifying potential donors to support a program.

SC staff may seek support for child soldiers programming from one or more donors. Accepting funds from multiple donors can be helpful in enabling SC to implement a more holistic program (e.g. one donor funds the vocational training component of a child

soldiers program and another funds the psychosocial component) or to extend the life of a program (e.g. one donor funds the first year of a child soldiers program and another donor funds years two and three). However, it is important to ensure that the expectations and requirements of multiple donors can be reconciled with one another. It is also important to ensure that the requirements and expectations of each potential donor can be reconciled with SC's mission and organizational capacity.

Each donor typically has specific interests and parameters for funding (target groups, timeframes, types of programming, etc.). It is important for SC staff to secure as much information as possible about potential donors' interests and funding parameters. In addition, donors often work out agreements on who will fund what programs in a particular country. It is also important to understand these agreements. This information can be obtained in a number of ways.

First, field staff should check with SC headquarters for information on possible donors. Second, SC field staff should consult with colleagues in other agencies (donors and NGOs) for information about potential donors. Agencies responsible for coordination of efforts in war-affected areas may be especially helpful in this regard (e.g. OCHA, UNHCR, etc.). Third, SC field staff should communicate directly with representatives of potential donors in the program country. Some donors have no in-country presence and only visit occasionally. It is important to meet with these representatives during their visits if possible.

## **PROGRAM DESIGN AND STRATEGIC PLANNING**

Through the program design and strategic planning process, program designers make multiple decisions about the program. These decisions, discussed in the following sections, are:

- Determining the intended beneficiary group(s).
- Determining the scale and duration of the program.
- Selecting the geographic location(s) of the program.
- Formulating goals and objectives.
- Selecting implementing partners for the program.
- Selecting interventions.
- Developing a program timeline.

- Determining staffing needs.
- Budgeting.
- Identifying potential negative effects of programs and ways to address them.

The order of these decisions will vary from organization to organization according to the particular opportunities and constraints facing program designers and according to individual designers' preferences. The overall process of decision-making is likely to be iterative, with later steps requiring review and revision of earlier steps until all aspects of the program strategy are harmonized.

Those who can/should be involved in program design/strategic planning include:

- Staff of the SC field office in country if there is already a presence.
- Consultant/s specializing in program design and proposal development and in programming for child soldiers/war-affected children.
- Representatives of potential programming partners (national NGO staff, etc.).
- Government officials, if relevant and effective.
- Former child soldiers, community members, government officials, other relevant people in the country — via focus groups and other approaches.

Designers of programs to assist child soldiers should consider a range of factors as inputs to the strategic planning process, including:

- SC global program principles.
- SC existing and potential capacity in the country where a program is being planned.
- Information garnered through the national situation assessment about needs, opportunities, and resources at the national level.
- Insight from local situation assessment about community strengths, structures, and dynamics.
- Availability of resources — financial, human, and technological.
- Potential influence of the program on other programming and policy in the target country and beyond.

## ***Determining the intended beneficiary group(s)***

An important early step in the process of program design and strategic planning is definition of the intended beneficiary groups. Possible beneficiary groups include:

- All children who served with an armed group in any capacity (recommended, especially for demobilization programming).
- All children vulnerable to recruitment into an armed group (recommended for recruitment prevention programming).
- Only fighters: those who have used arms and have been disarmed (not a recommended approach).
- Only girls/young women: it may be appropriate to focus a program or program component on female survivors of sexual/gender-based violence.
- Only combatants from one force because they suffered particular trauma, or to avoid conflict within interim care centers.
- Children who were under 18 when recruited but over 18 when demobilized.

In a program with multiple components, it may be necessary to designate multiple target groups. For example, in a program that combines demobilization in interim care centers with reintegration into communities there may be two different target groups.

1. In the demobilization phase, the target group for most interventions would likely be all the children in the interim care center — both child soldiers and non-soldier separated children, with specific interventions targeted to more intensively support child soldiers.
2. In the reintegration phase, the target group for interventions would likely be all conflict-affected children in the community into which child soldiers are being reintegrated.

Some interventions — such as facilitating traditional ceremonies of forgiveness and acceptance — should be targeted specifically for child soldiers.

It is important to consider the ages of children who are being recruited, demobilized, and/or reintegrated. Strategies to prevent recruitment of young children will differ from strategies for recruitment prevention targeted at adolescents. Likewise, effective reintegration of adolescent child soldiers may require different approaches (e.g. vocational training and small

groups homes) than reintegration of younger soldiers (e.g. family reunification and primary education). Program designers may need to develop separate program components targeting children of different age groups.

### ***Determining the scale and duration of the program***

The scale and duration of a child soldier program is often strongly shaped by the availability of funds and by donors' priorities and parameters. Program scale and duration may also be shaped by SC's organizational capacity in the country, though capacity can be built rapidly if necessary.

There is often a difficult compromise to make between the scale and intensity of activities when designing child soldier programs. In general, SC will undertake programming that assists a large number of beneficiaries rather than highly intensive activity that deliver substantial benefits to a relatively small number of beneficiaries. This is because there are usually many child soldiers in need of assistance, and also because intensive resource investment in individuals or locations can create dependency and undermine sustainability. However, it is important to maintain high standards of quality even in large-scale programs.

SC staff are advised to develop a child soldiers programming strategy for the long term, even if the funding available is only immediately available for the short-term. This can guide initial management of programs, raises awareness of the long-term nature of reintegration with donors and the international community, and provides SC with the information needed to seek long-term funding. However, it is important to recognize that most conflict or post-conflict societies are unstable, and much may change quickly. Thus SC program managers should also be flexible and responsive to rapid shifts in circumstances. If conflict spreads, worsens, or re-erupts, SC may need to alter the scale or duration of programming to cope with the new situation. On a positive note, program scale, duration, and strategy may also change if peace is consolidated and maintained; such a change will allow for a shift from emergency response mode to post-conflict transition and development approaches that will facilitate long-term reintegration efforts.

## ***Selecting the geographic location(s) for the program***

The geographic location(s) of a child soldier program will often be shaped by a number of factors, including donor priorities, government priorities, and safety and security issues. Another important factor is location of other agencies' programs. SC may wish to focus on underserved areas, or may wish to co-locate in areas with other agencies in order to implement joint or linked programs (e.g. SC coordinates psychosocial and education programs, another agency implements health care and water/sanitation programs.) An additional factor to consider is the location of ongoing conflicts. There may be a need to establish a limited presented relatively close to conflict zones in order to be able to assist children soon after they leave armed groups. However, interim care centers and reintegration programs should be located a reasonable distance away from conflict zones, due to the risks of the spread of conflict, raids, attacks, and other dangers. In areas where landmines have been used, it is also important to locate programs in areas that are free of mines.

Locating programs in urban areas has a number of advantages from an operational perspective, and may be a better environment for older child soldiers who seek to establish independent livelihoods. Programs in rural areas often face more logistical difficulties, however, these programs have the advantage of being located near child soldiers' home areas, allowing them to make temporary visits to their communities before they return permanently.

## ***Formulating goals and objectives***

Formulation of goals and objectives in an emergency is a progressive process, with objectives being refined as they move through the planning and implementation process. It may also be necessary to revise goals and objectives after implementation has started, based on lessons that are learned about what is and is not possible and necessary. All key stakeholders in a program, including SC program management, implementing partners, donors, should agree on goals and objectives. When possible, representatives of intended beneficiary groups should also be included in this process.

**Goals** are considered to be general, overarching statements of intention. Goals can be viewed as statements of intended program impacts. Goals should be developed with reference to the problems and issues the program seeks to address, the national and local contexts in which the program is to be implemented, and the SC mission and program

principles. Illustrative examples of goals and objectives which can be used for specific child soldiers program or for the child soldiers component of a broader program for all war-affected children and youth are presented here:

- To prevent recruitment of child soldiers in [geographic area].
- To support the demobilization of child soldiers in [geographic area].
- To facilitate the physical and psychosocial healing and social reintegration of demobilized child soldiers in [geographic area].
- To enable former adolescent soldiers to earn a livelihood and support themselves.

**Objectives** are specific statements of intention that translate the broad goals into particular, measurable commitments. Objectives are statements of intended program *outcomes*. Objectives should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. For each objective, planners should identify one or more indicators that measure progress towards achievement of the objective. The section on monitoring and evaluation below discusses indicators for child soldier programs.

Examples of objectives for child soldier programs include the following:

- To demobilize [#] of child soldiers/combatants during [period].
- To arrange/facilitate sustainable placements for [all or %] of demobilized children.
- To ensure that [\_\_%] of demobilized children remain in the placement situation after [period].
- To ensure that [\_\_%] of demobilized children have improved education after [period].
- To ensure that [\_\_%] of demobilized children have improved health status after [period].
- To ensure that [\_\_%] of families caring for demobilized children are able to support them after [period].
- To ensure that [\_\_%] of demobilized children placed in alternative care settings are able to support themselves after [period].
- To prevent the re-recruitment into an armed group of at least [\_\_%] of demobilized children for at least [\_\_\_] years after demobilization.

Programs will need to define what constitutes “improved education,” “improved health status,” and other standards in these objectives based on local conditions and circumstances. Some programs may find it useful to develop separate objectives for child soldiers based on gender or age.

## ***Selecting implementing partners for the program***

In some contexts, SC will hire its own staff and implement a program directly. But in most cases, SC will work with and through one or more implementing partners in order to enhance sustainability. Possible implementing partners include national and local NGOs, religious institutions, national/local governments, and international NGOs. Implementing partners are one of several types of partners with which SC will collaborate on a child soldier program. Other partners include donors, the press, government offices and officials, and a variety of other institutions and individuals.

There are many potential advantages to working with one or more implementing partners including:

- Implementing partners may have better relations and more legitimacy with communities, and thus may be more effective in working with communities.
- Working with implementing partners may allow SC to reach more children and/or communities.
- Working with implementing partners may be an effective way of constructively influencing their and other organizations' policies and practice.
- Implementing partners may be present for the long term, unlike SC.
- The capacity of implementing partners can be strengthened through work with SC and then may be transferred to other efforts in the future.

The potential disadvantages of working with one or more implementing partners include the following:

- Reduced control
- More time-consuming
- Increased administrative costs
- Greater distance between SC and the ultimate beneficiaries
- Risk of choosing a partner who is not sensitive to these issues and does more harm than good.

As an integral part of the strategic planning process, SC should undertake a thorough survey of potential implementing partners that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of

each. SC should then carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of working with one or more of these partners before determining the specific partners with which it will work.

Key criteria to consider when selecting implementing partners include the potential partners':

- Geographic location
- Relevant experience
- Legitimacy with local organizations and communities
- Financial and administrative capacities
- Costs
- Commitment to the issue and to empowering, sustainable approaches

Possible implementing partners that SC staff designing child soldier programs should consider include:

- *National and local NGOs*

These partners are often preferable because they are likely to be more familiar with local circumstances, traditions, etc. Communities may be more open to them, but in some instances they may also be negatively perceived. SC staff should investigate perceptions before committing to partnership.

- *Religious institutions*

These partners often play a powerful role of moral leadership in the community and are usually perceived as legitimate and credible. There may be tension between organized religions and traditional religions; programs should seek to incorporate both organized and traditional religions when possible.

- *National and local governments*

They may have a significant presence on the ground. They certainly should be involved, but rarely are the implementing partner for a SC program. Usually, SC will work with them rather than contracting them - especially because they often have multiple other demands on their time and limited resources. In some instances, SC may build the capacity of youth development officers, social welfare officers, or other government field staff to assist ex-child soldiers and facilitate their reintegration.

- *International NGOs*

They may be implementing partners if SC is managing an umbrella grant or is part of a consortium of implementing NGOs collaborating in an area. SC may manage the entire program, or only part of the program and other NGOs handle parts of it (e.g. emergency education, vocational training, etc.)

Because of the instability of emergency situations, SC's implementing partners may change over time. SC may need to assemble a network of partners that changes as partners enter and leave. SC should avoid weakening local organizations and government for the sake of strengthening a single SC program. Instead, SC should develop partnerships that strengthen local institutions and leave a legacy of lasting capacity.

SC should develop written agreements with all partners with which it forms formal programming partnerships. If SC is paying the partner to perform services, a full contract should be developed, approved, and signed by authorized staff of SC and the partner. If SC is not paying a programming partner, then SC and the partner should develop and sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that clearly states the roles and responsibilities of each party in the partnership.

### ***Selecting interventions***

A vital step in the program design process is selecting which interventions SC will implement from the programming options discussed in Section IV, *child soldier programming framework*. This selection will be based on a range of factors explored through the situation assessment, including:

- The nature and extent of the child soldier challenge
- Key contextual factors, opportunities, and constraints
- Existing responses and gaps
- Potential programming partners
- The capacity of SC and its partners
- Donor priorities and parameters

For additional guidance on selecting interventions, see Section V, for a checklist of issues and questions for child soldier programs.

## ***Developing a program timeline***

Another step in the strategic planning process is developing a program timeline. The timeline should cover the entire program period that is anticipated. However, SC staff should be aware that the timeline may have to be adjusted as the program is implemented, in response to changes in the environment for implementation: the re-eruption of conflict, the spontaneous departure of a large number of child soldiers from an armed group, etc.

A program timeline is typically organized according to the main stages of program development and implementation below. The timeline indicates how long each stage will last and what activities will be implemented during the stage.

- *Pre-programming*  
Includes situation assessment, identification of donors and programming partners, proposal development, etc.
- *Start-up*  
Includes recruiting and training staff, securing vehicles and office space, formalizing relationships with programming partners, etc.
- *Implementation*  
May be divided into two or more phases, depending on nature of program and situation; e.g. beginning implementation in one geographic area, then adding two other areas in subsequent phases; or changing strategy when conflict ends and post-emergency period begins
- *Phase-out*  
To the extent possible, program designers should plan for the end of the programming from the program's beginning, in order to avoid raising false expectations or creating dependency among partner organizations and communities. This advance planning can help ensure the sustainability of the program's efforts.

## ***Budgeting***

An important part of the program design and strategic planning process is projecting the costs of a planned program and constructing a budget to meet these costs. For multi-year budgets, costs are often presented per year, then totaled. SC staff should check with the donor/s to whom the budget will be submitted to see if the donor/s have a preferred or required format for the budget.

The key elements of a typical child soldier program budget include:

- *Personnel*  
Including a Program Coordinator, child soldier specialists, and psychosocial experts. Expatriate and national full-time staff, plus consultants if necessary; this should include salary and any other benefits agreed upon, e.g. health care, emergency evacuation coverage, savings/ pension plans, etc.
- *Office expenses*  
Usually for multiple program sites. Rent, insurance, utilities, telecommunications, equipment, supplies, etc.
- *Transport*  
Vehicle purchase, insurance, fuel, maintenance, etc.
- *Training*  
Specifically on issues of community outreach, education, and working with different stakeholders such as local NGOs and the military.
- *Program materials*  
Reintegration kits for children or families, education materials, vocational training materials, etc.
- *Facility construction and maintenance* (optional)  
For interim care centers, etc.
- *Subsidies* (optional)  
Payments to families that foster children, artisans that apprentice adolescents, etc.
- *Evaluation*  
Usually by external evaluator/s.
- *ICR*  
Indirect cost recovery; SC staff should communicate with SC HQ about the level of ICR required.

## ***Potential negative effects of programs and how to address them***

SC staff engaged in program design should carefully consider the potential negative effects of child soldier programs and plan to avoid or mitigate these effects. Possible negative consequences of child soldier programs include the following:

- *The solidarity, esprit de corps, and authority structures among child soldiers may be reinforced if they stay together for long periods of time in an interim care center or other facility. This can lead to re-recruitment or mass departure of the children.*

RESPONSE: Develop activities to facilitate a break with military life after demobilization and encourage programming with small groups of children. Emphasize community reintegration when possible to prevent long-term stays in care centers.

- *Former child soldiers may become dependent on the services provided at an interim care center, leading to unwillingness to depart.*

RESPONSE: Minimize the duration of children's stay and do not provide support that greatly exceeds the support available in the community where the child will be reintegrated.

- *Assembling a large group of ex-child soldiers in one site may attract recruitment or retaliation.*

RESPONSE: Locate facilities at a reasonable distance from active conflict zones, ensure that security is strong at the facility, and resettle children in family situations as rapidly as possible.

- *Children who are reintegrated into a community may face retaliation by community members or by members of the armed group that they left.*

RESPONSE: Work with community leaders in advance of reintegration to ensure acceptance and protection of children by the community. If children are in danger of retaliation from their former armed group, consider reintegrating the children into other communities and maintaining confidentiality about their locations.

- *Resentment may emerge toward child soldiers if they are seen as recipients of more benefits than other children; this perception may also provide another 'incentive' to join an armed group for other children and their families.*

RESPONSE: Balance assistance to ex-child soldiers with assistance for all war-affected/vulnerable children in an area. Avoid programming that isolates or differentiates ex-child soldiers from other children.

### ***Developing program proposals***

The program design and strategic planning process should yield the information necessary to develop one or more program proposals. SC staff should usually develop a separate program proposal for each potential donor rather than developing a single proposal for all donors. The proposal writers (usually SC field staff) should seek information on the format required by each donor and should follow the format closely..

A typical proposal will include most or all of the following:

- Executive summary
- Problem statement and situation assessment
- Goals and objectives
- Implementation strategy
  - Target groups
  - Interventions
  - Location(s)
  - Partners
  - Timeline
  - Staffing
- Monitoring and evaluation
- SC's organizational capacity
- Budget

Some donors may wish to receive and review a brief concept paper before receiving a full proposal. Again, SC staff should seek guidance from donor agency staff about the preferred format and content of this concept paper before preparing it.

## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

### *Selecting, training, and supporting staff*

#### **SELECTING STAFF**

Staffing needs for child soldier programs will vary widely, according to the types of interventions selected; the number of children, families and communities to be served; the availability and skill levels of local staff; and other factors. The three types of staff that will typically be needed for a child soldier program are:

- *Management*  
A Program manager, deputy manager or senior program coordinator depending on the scope of the project are necessary management personnel. Technical specialists or specialists in youth programming, psychosocial support, community mobilization, and education are also necessary.
- *Program staff*  
Staff who are responsible for delivering programs by working with partner organizations or directly with children, families, and communities are important to programming success. These include trainers, teachers, social workers, outreach workers, and counselors.
- *Support/administrative staff*  
Secretaries, bookkeepers, drivers, cleaners, cooks, maintenance personnel are critical to efficient and effective program delivery.

The type of qualifications and experience to seek in staff will depend on the interventions to be implemented. Just as important as a candidate's formal qualifications is her/his attitude to child soldiers and their families and communities. The best staff members are often those who are most caring and nurturing, even if they lack certain forms of education or experience. In this regard, it is often advisable to employ women and mature married couples for work directly with children. It is important that staff who will be working with communities and/or partner organizations are acceptable to and respected by these organizations. To the extent possible, SC programs should seek to hire capable national staff rather than bringing in expatriates.

It may be possible and desirable to hire former child soldiers (adults or youth) to work as staff. The advantage of hiring ex-child soldiers is that they are familiar with the experience of the child soldiers in the program and thus may have more empathy and credibility with them. These young people may also serve as role models for the more recently demobilized children. The disadvantages include that they may seek to assert authority over children in an inappropriate fashion, and some children may perceive them as the enemy if they fought for another faction.

### **TRAINING AND SUPPORTING STAFF**

All staff in a child soldier program — management, program staff, and administrative and support personnel — should receive training in addressing the specific needs of child soldiers. In many programs, ex-child soldiers are as likely to turn to a cook or cleaner for assistance as to a social worker. Small cadres of staff members can be trained in specific skills, then train all other staff members. Important topics for training include:

- Child health and development<sup>12</sup>
- Children's reactions to loss and trauma.
- Effective communication with children.
- Dealing with violent or threatening behavior.
- Dealing with substance abuse.
- Recognizing and building on children's strengths and assets.

Training should be ongoing and responsive to requests by staff members for guidance in particular areas. This responsive training can be an important part of the overall support needed for staff of child soldier programs, which face difficult work in an often-unstable environment. Program managers should find other ways of helping program staff and preventing burnout. Possible approaches include regular group sessions to discuss and address problems and frustrations, adequate rest and recuperation periods, and fostering mutual support networks among staff.

### ***Working with the media***

It is important to have the problem of child soldiers and the program itself covered by the media. This can lead to increases in support for present and future child soldier programming. However, program staff needs to ensure that media deal with children in a respectful, compassionate, non-exploitative way. Program staff working with the media should

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<sup>12</sup>For discussion of child development theory and implications for emergency programs, refer to the *Field Guide to Psychosocial Programs in Emergencies* by J. Williamson in this series.

take account of the manner in which sensitive issues are raised, the child's right to anonymity, confidentiality of all information, and the frequency of contacts with the media. Program staff should be available to counsel the child after an interview with media personnel, in case the interview causes anxiety or distress by requiring the child to recount past suffering. In addition, program staff should strongly encourage media to emphasize the strengths, resilience, and hope of former child soldiers as well as their vulnerabilities and difficulties.

### ***Other issues***

Program managers should take all measures possible to ensure the safety and security of children and staff. One of the most important of these measures is developing realistic contingency plans for emergencies (attacks on interim care centers, outbreak of conflict in the areas, etc.). Program managers should determine who can be contacted for protection, where children and staff can escape to, and how they will get there.

## **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

### ***Reasons for monitoring and evaluation***

SC child soldier programs need to be monitored and evaluated to allow program managers and staff to measure progress and results and refine interventions to be more effective in reaching the project goals. Effective monitoring and evaluation enable program staff to identify program strengths and weaknesses, and then modify program strategy in order to build on the strengths and address the weaknesses. Without monitoring and evaluation, program staff would not know what work the program is doing, and whether it is 'working': whether the program is achieving its objectives.

Monitoring and evaluation are also the means by which SC provides accountability to its donors and advocates with donors about the importance of child soldier programs in post-conflict situations. In addition, findings of monitoring and evaluation can be used in the design of future SC programs. Finally, SC uses the findings of monitoring and evaluation as basis and evidence for efforts to influence the policies and practices of other child soldier programs and governmental and non-governmental agencies.

## ***Monitoring***

Monitoring tracks the program's progress, determining if planned activities are being implemented, if these activities are of an appropriate quality, and if the activities are producing the short-term results (*outputs*) intended. Monitoring is conducted continuously throughout the program period.

## ***Evaluation***

Evaluation examines the program's medium-term and long-term results (*outcomes*) to determine if the program's goals and objectives have been achieved. Evaluation is conducted at one or more particular points in time during the program period — usually at the mid-point or end of the program term — although evaluations can be conducted more frequently. To date, few long-term evaluations of child soldier programs (called longitudinal studies) have been conducted. In planning an evaluation, it is necessary to balance the cost of the evaluation against the benefits that can result from it.

## ***Indicators***

Indicators are measures of the progress and results of interventions. Indicators are the 'meter sticks' of humanitarian work: they are the main means of measurement used to determine if a program is meeting its objectives. Indicators should be chosen before program implementation begins, at the same time that the program's objectives are being developed. If necessary, a program's set of indicators can be revised as a program's implementation advances to improve relevance and usefulness.

Objectives and indicators for child soldier programs should be developed using a collaborative process led by program staff and involving all the key stakeholders in the program, including donor staff, staff of implementing partners, and — crucially — representatives of the intended beneficiaries of the program: child soldiers and their family and community members.

The overall aim of SC child soldier programs is to improve the lives of former child soldiers by ensuring protection, promoting care, and facilitating development. The key challenge in developing objectives and indicators for child soldier programs is to find relevant ways to define what constitutes improvement in the lives of ex-child soldiers. To meet this

challenge, each child soldier program will need to develop its own objectives and indicators. When possible, SC program staff should consult with ex-child soldiers and community members to gain the information and insight necessary to develop objectives and indicators that are meaningful and relevant in the local context. Focus groups and key informant interviews are useful approaches to learning in this way from child soldiers and community members.

### ***Illustrative indicators***

These indicators are not intended to be prescriptive. Rather, they are intended to serve as examples of possible indicators that SC child soldier program may consider as they go through the process of developing objectives and indicators described above.

#### *Possible output indicators:*

- Number of beneficiaries
  - Number of children demobilized
  - Number and percent of demobilized children reunited with their families
  - Number and percent of demobilized children placed in alternative living situation (foster family, independent group home, etc.)
  - Number of children reached with prevention messages
- Level of satisfaction with service provided (measured by survey or focus group)
  - Children
  - Families receiving children
  - Communities receiving children

#### *Possible outcome indicators* (measured using sampling except when # of beneficiaries is small)

- Percent of demobilized children who remain in placement setting one year after placement
- Percent of demobilized children whose education improves one year after placement
- Number and percent of demobilized children of school-going age who are attending school regularly one year after placement
- Percent of demobilized children whose health status remains satisfactory or improves one year after placement

- Percent of demobilized children whose psychosocial status remains satisfactory or improves one year after placement (perhaps determined by % of caregivers reporting 'good or acceptable behavior' by the child)
- Percent of demobilized children who are supporting themselves/living at a standard equivalent to that of their non-soldier peers one year after demobilization
- Percent of demobilized children who are re-recruited into armed service within one year after demobilization



## VI. CONCLUSION<sup>13</sup>

This concluding checklist is intended to serve as a quick reference for designers and managers of child soldier programs. The questions raised are discussed in more detail in this handbook on the page numbers indicated.

### ASSESSING THE SITUATION

#### *The children:*

- How many child soldiers are still in armed forces?
- How many child soldiers have left the armed forces? Through what channel/s did they leave? How many of them have been reintegrated into durable settings? How many are still in demobilization camps or other facilities?
- How many child soldiers can be expected to leave/be released from the armed forces in the next 1 month, 3 months, 6 months, 12 months?
- What ages are the children who have been part of armed forces?
- How long have the children been part of the armed forces?
- Were the children recruited using force, or did they join 'voluntarily'?
- Were children recruited from particular groups? (Children from specific geographic areas; street children; refugee/internally displaced children; children from certain ethnic, religious, or national groups, etc.)
- What roles have these children played in the armed groups? What have they done to others, and what has been done to them? (Abuse, deprivation, indoctrination, etc.)
- How is the physical health of the child soldiers? (Injuries, malnutrition, respiratory or skin infections, sexually transmitted infections, drug dependency, etc.)
- What is the psychosocial status of the child soldiers?
- What is the education level and work experience of the child soldiers?

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<sup>13</sup>This checklist is also included on the CD-ROM in order to facilitate reproduction of the material for assessment purposes.

*The context:*

- Has the conflict ended nationwide, or is it still continuing in all or part of the country? Where?
- If the conflict is continuing, what are the prospects for cessation of hostilities?
- Where is it safe to travel? To establish demobilization sites and interim care centers? To reintegrate children into communities?
- What are the key contextual factors, opportunities, and constraints in the situation?
- What responses to the child soldier challenge are already underway?
- What gaps exist in current responses?
- What organizations are potential partners for SC in child soldier programming?
- Does SC have the capacity to design and implement child soldier programming in the country? If not, what is needed to develop this capacity?

*Funding:*

- What donors are or may begin supporting child soldier programming?
- What are possible donors' funding priorities and parameters? (donors' preferred target groups, types of activities, timeframes, etc.)
- How should SC contact these donors?

## **CHOOSING PROGRAM OPTIONS**

- Based on SC staff's assessment of the situation, which of the following types of child soldier programming should SC pursue?
  - Recruitment prevention
  - Demobilization
  - Reintegration
  - A combination of these

*Recruitment prevention:*

- Where are children at greatest risk of recruitment?
- What groups of children are at greatest risk of recruitment?
- Who should be targeted for recruitment prevention awareness? (children, parents, teachers, recruiters, etc.)
- Who should carry out awareness raising efforts? (government, NGOs, religious groups, etc.)

- What media can convey recruitment prevention messages effectively? (radio, posters, leaflets, etc.)
- Is recruitment prevention integrated into all community-based programs in conflict-affected areas?
- What traditional mechanisms for protecting children and preventing recruitment can be strengthened?
- Are all births registered? Do all children have birth records and proof of age?
- Do young people have opportunities to attend school and to earn livelihoods, so that the temptation of joining an armed group is reduced?
- What advocacy efforts are underway to prevent the recruitment of children by armed groups?
- Which of the above recruitment prevention initiatives should SC support? How?

*Demobilization:*

- What process exists for demobilizing soldiers? Who is responsible for it? Who manages it?
- Are there specific provisions in the demobilization that apply to child soldiers?
- How do children reach the demobilization sites? (Capture, surrender, desertion, etc.)
- What role/s should SC play in reception centers/demobilization sites?
  - Provide/fund/train social workers for screening and initial counseling of child soldiers
  - Transport child soldiers to interim care centers
  - Provide short term psychosocial assistance for child soldiers
  - Provide basic services — water and sanitation, medical screening and care, etc.
- What role/s should SC play in interim care centers for child soldiers and other unaccompanied children?
  - Construct and/or manage center/s, or build capacity of partners to do so
  - Coordinate efforts among multiple partners working at one or several centers
  - Coordinate or undertake family tracing
  - Provide certain services at centers, or build capacity of partners to do so (health, education, psychosocial support, etc.)
- What role/s should SC play in advocating for demobilization of child soldiers?

*Reintegration:*

- Should reintegration activities be focused on child soldiers or on all unaccompanied children?
- Is it safe for child soldiers to be reintegrated into communities?
- Do child soldiers wish to be reintegrated into their home communities, to join other communities, or to live on their own?
- What factors make child soldiers reluctant to reintegrate into communities?
- What factors make it difficult for communities to accept child soldiers?
- Should SC implement reintegration activities directly, or support and strengthen partners (usually national/local NGOs) to do so?
- What role/s should SC/partners play in arranging a living situation for child soldiers?
  - Facilitating family tracing
  - Reunifying children with their own families/communities
  - Arranging foster family placements
  - Organizing small group homes
- What role/s should SC/partners play in facilitating community acceptance, reconciliation, and care?
  - National level:
    - Awareness campaigns that encourage communities to welcome child soldiers (radio, posters, traveling dramas, etc.)
    - Advocacy for reintegration, targeting prominent leaders in politics, religion, athletics, arts, etc.
  - Local level:
    - Meeting with community leaders to address concerns and plan reintegration
    - Reviving traditional mechanisms for individual and community healing (purification/forgiveness rituals, etc.)
    - Promoting reconciliation in the community following reintegration
    - Providing training and support for community-based psychosocial activities for war-affected children

- What role/s should SC/partners play in strengthening the capacity of ex-soldiers and other war-affected children to support themselves?
  - Education initiatives:
    - Basic education (building/repairing schools, supplying materials, training teachers, etc.)
    - Informal education (literacy and numeracy for out-of-school youth; training in conflict management, decision-making, reproductive health; etc.)
  - Economic opportunities initiatives:
    - Apprenticeship schemes or vocational/skills training
    - Agricultural training
    - Provision of seeds, tools, and other agricultural inputs
    - Microcredit
- What role/s should SC/partners play in promoting development in communities into which child soldiers and other separated children are reintegrated?
  - Reconstruction of damaged infrastructure and facilities (roads, bridges, schools, community centers, etc.)
  - Health interventions
  - Economic opportunities interventions
  - Other community development interventions

## **PLANNING AND MANAGING THE PROGRAM**

- What beneficiary groups will the program focus on?
- Where will the program be located?
- What will be the scale and duration of the program?
- What will be the goals and objectives of the program?
- What interventions will be implemented?
- What partners will work with SC to implement the program?
- What resources will be required for the program?
- What staffing will be required for the program?
- What are the potential negative effects of the program, and how can they be addressed?
- What indicators and process will be used to monitor and evaluate the program?

## **ENSURING ALIGNMENT WITH SC PROGRAMMING PRINCIPLES**

- Is the program child-centered?
- Does the program promote gender equity?
- Does the program empower child soldiers and partner communities?
- Is the program at appropriate scale?
- Are the program's impacts measurable and sustainable?

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## **APPENDIX 2: WEBSITES AND ONLINE REPORTS**

### **SOLDOC Database, Radda Barnen**

[www.rb.se](http://www.rb.se)

*A bibliographic database on topics related to child soldiers hosted by Save the Children Sweden.*

### **Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers**

[www.child-soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org)

*Established by six leading international NGOs to advocate for an end to child recruitment, and specifically for adoption of and adherence to the Optional Protocol to the CRC.*

### **UNICEF**

[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

*Includes policy statements on child soldiers, details of the Optional Protocol, and information on Security Council resolution No. 1314 on children and war.*

### **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

[www.unhchr.ch](http://www.unhchr.ch)

*Provides information on key treaties, juvenile justice provisions and country by country observations of the CRC.*

### **Human Rights Watch**

[www.hrw.org/campaigns/crp](http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/crp)

*Includes detailed reports on the situation of child combatants in various countries, including Uganda, Liberia, and Sudan.*

### **Center for Defense Information**

[www.cdi.org](http://www.cdi.org)

*Various documents offering a military perspective on ending the use of children in armed conflict.*

### **Queensland University of Technology**

[www.qut.edu.au/publications/bsspsych\\_report/intro.html](http://www.qut.edu.au/publications/bsspsych_report/intro.html)

*Annotated bibliography on the psychological effects of war.*

