

**THE KAMPALA
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE RECOVERY AND
REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN
AND YOUTH AFFECTED BY
ARMED CONFLICT**

centre for children
in vulnerable
situations



PREAMBLE

On this day, 27 September 2013, in Kampala, Uganda,

The drafters of these recommendations, representing academia and civil society, and basing our views on collective professional experience and expertise in child rights, transitional justice, psychology, community-based programming, pedagogical sciences, education, global public health, and social work,

Incorporating the views expressed in consultation with youth groups in Latin America and East Africa,

Recognising that the mental well-being of a child is as important as his or her physical and basic material needs, and psychosocial support is needed in order for a child to overcome challenging or harmful experiences and to be enabled to live a productive and creative life, fulfilling their responsibilities and developing a sense of societal belonging,

Considering the need for programmes that address the recovery and reintegration of children who have been affected by the devastation of armed conflict,

Recalling the text of Article 39 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), whereby State parties are required to promote the 'physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts',

Further recalling the stipulation of Article 39 that such recovery and reintegration should 'take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child', and keeping in mind the interdependence of the general principles contained within the Convention on the Rights of the Child on non discrimination, best interests, life survival and development and respect for children's views,

Acknowledging that 'reintegration' also applies to children and young people who are experiencing 'integration' for the first time,

Understanding that reintegration is a long-term, communal and societal process that entails creating an environment where children affected by and associated with fighting forces or groups are enabled to find a role in their community; and that reintegration is transformational, representing a move away from a culture of militarisation, discrimination or social injustice towards a culture that is conducive to the realisation of child rights,

Acknowledging the significant strides made in this field to-date and the successful work that has been undertaken in supporting the recovery and reintegration of children and young people all over the world,

Calling on donor agencies and civil society to consider long-term and sustainable interventions when supporting or implementing recovery and reintegration projects,

Acknowledging that recovery and reintegration programming applies not only to former child combatants, but to all children affected by war, as well as their extended family and communities; and that particular care should be taken to account for the gendered nature of children's experiences of conflict,

Recognising that working towards successful recovery and reintegration requires listening and learning from children, and working with communities, taking into account local realities, local capacities, and respecting but not idealising local practices. Conflict-affected communities are not homogenous, and reintegration is a highly context-specific process,

Understanding that successful recovery and reintegration programmes must, above all, avoid causing unintended harm to children and young people by ensuring that child impact assessments are conducted prior to the commencement of all projects and programmes,

Acknowledging that projects that support children and young people in the midst or aftermath of conflict should involve them in consultations at the beginning of an initiative, and through the implementation and evaluation phases, and that creating opportunities for children to voice their opinions allows them to play a positive role in their own development, and reintegration projects are most successful when they are implemented both for and with children,

Recognising that maintaining sustainable and meaningful dialogue with both state and non-state armed actors on the release and reintegration of children is essential in working towards the realisation of viable collaborative commitments and action plans that aim to prevent grave violations against children, assist them in accessing services and support them in their recovery, reintegration and development,

Determining that it is critical that research is conducted internally and with external partners to establish systematic and reliable evidence on recovery and reintegration programming, and that all practitioners in this field must conduct and share practice-based outcomes and process evaluations of their work (especially through longitudinal and experimental designs, where feasible) in order to establish a strong body of supported evidence, contemporary methodologies and verified best practices on successful recovery and reintegration outcomes for children and their communities,

Recognising that recovery and integration programmes should aim to enable children to fully claim their rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and aim to improve not only the situation of children, but also of their families and communities,

Have agreed on the following recommendations to provide guidance to civil society practitioners, international organisations, national authorities, donors and academics working in the field of recovery and reintegration, in order to promote best practices and facilitate collaboration:

I. Society and Community

1. **Community led:** Recovery and reintegration processes must be led by community action and supported and assisted by child protection actors. It is essential to work with family members, peers, friends, teachers, religious and traditional leaders, and other stakeholders from the very outset, in order to attain the goal of enabling children and young people who have been affected by armed conflict to be accepted and respected, to help them find a role in the community, and to strengthen their resilience. In addition, taking a systemic and contextual approach that involves the community as a key actor ensures not only the best social support possible for a given child, but also assists in the post-conflict restoration of community networks.

2. **Utilising existing structures:** Reintegration processes should mobilise existing community support structures, including appropriate religious, cultural, educational, psychosocial, protection, and economic structures, for improving the well-being of children, young people and their families. Communities should make their own decisions about how to balance traditional and external support structures.

3. **Explaining Recovery and Reintegration:** It is essential to inform local communities and decision makers on how recovery and reintegration projects work and how the projects can benefit the young people in their communities. The resulting communication can assist communities to understand and mitigate the benefits and potential pitfalls of these projects. Children's views must be part of the debate, and culturally appropriate creative methods can be utilised to facilitate this discussion, so long as they do not draw attention to specific children or reinforce stigma or prejudice.

4. **Gender & Identity:** Most recovery and reintegration programs are geared towards boys and men, whilst the consequences of conflict equally affect women and girls. More attention must be paid to the recovery and reintegration of young women and girls, including economic reintegration. In addition, the right to identity and nationality must be fulfilled for all children, especially those born to mothers associated with armed groups. This entails the provision of birth certification rights, inheritance protection and access to services.

5. **Gender & Age:** Reintegration programmes must take into account the different ways in which conflict affects boys and girls, young and old children, by ensuring full understanding of how an armed conflict affected different groups. Any analyses conducted ought to disaggregate data by gender and age, where possible. The changing nature of conflict also means that efforts to address children and armed conflict need to be more responsive and aware of how gender norms and inequalities between girls and boys can increase vulnerabilities. Girls and boys, in particular adolescents, face different protection risks, have different needs and choices, and possess different skills, knowledge and coping strategies that must be understood and recognised in order to garner the most effective prevention and response efforts.

6. **Family reunification:**

- Family reunification ought to be a priority, and should be conducted in a manner and pace that promotes the growth, safety and protection of children. It is about much more than a “physical” reunification in the family, and therefore more emphasis ought to be placed on the social and relational aspects of the process, particularly in restoring the relationships between a child and their family members.
- The best interest of the child should be of paramount consideration and the child must be a key actor throughout the reunification process, with their evolving capacity taken into account at every stage.
- If feasible and appropriate, livelihood support may be provided to families in order to guarantee that reintegration is sustainable and a child is placed in an environment conducive to learning and development.
- Families need time to adjust to the return of their children and help to address any on-going issues, especially trauma. Paramount to the process of reunification is establishing a secure attachment between child and caregiver, and this can only happen if caregivers’ issues are also addressed. These can be openly discussed with children and parents

during home visits and/or through personal counselling.

- Alternative care options must be available for children who cannot or should not be reunited with their own families.
- If a child is older and not returning to their family, the community should be engaged to support the returnee appropriately.

7. **Local practices:** The recovery and reintegration of children should be contextual and sensitive to local cultural beliefs, practices and religions. Incorporating local methods may help facilitate reintegration and promote community reconciliation and peace building.

8. **Psychological counselling, medical and social support:** Professional counselling capacity should be developed in order to establish community structures that provide psycho-education, assessment, treatment and follow-up of mental health issues on individual, family or group, and community levels. The availability of counselling support can be instrumental in helping to rebuild social structures and community networks.

9. **Access to Justice:** Each State Party to the Rome Statute has an obligation to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of war crimes within the mandate of the International Criminal Court. The State Party must also inform children affected by armed conflict about official reintegration processes, the possibility for legal remedies in accordance with national law, and the right to reparation and how to claim it. In providing reparations to children and young people, one-off financial interventions should be avoided.

10. **Community Cohesion:** Some communities lack social cohesion or identity, or have an embedded sense of militarisation. In such contexts, demilitarisation through the building of social capital and community cooperation - sometimes with international support - is extremely important for ensuring the sustainable and meaningful reintegration of children and youth.

11. **Skills Training & Economic Considerations:** Lack of economic opportunities play a role in recruitment of children into armed forces and groups, and it is therefore essential to work with communities in order to gain a firm understanding of the economic drivers operating in a given context. Careful analysis must be conducted prior to establishing vocational training programmes, for example, to determine niches in the market and to prevent a surplus of certain trades or perpetuating structural inequalities. Training programmes must be linked

systematically with efforts to strengthen the economic infrastructure, and the result of vocational training should not only be skilled and certified workers but viable job opportunities in a sustainable sector. Life skills such as numeracy training and advice on careers and financial matters are essential components of this. Finally, successful reintegration can develop the skills and abilities that children and young people have gained in the time they spent with armed forces and groups, and turn these skills – catering, logistical or medical skills for example – into ones that can be utilised in a peaceful way that aid their future careers.

12. **Long-term engagement:** Successful recovery and reintegration requires committed and sustained engagement with communities, children and young people, and should not take the form of one-off or short-term interventions. Consistent follow-up with children and young people who are in the process of reintegrating, as well as with their communities, is essential, and provides the opportunity to give encouragement and identify on-going challenges and community-driven solutions.

II. Transitional Justice

13. **Safe involvement and empowerment:** Transitional justice processes must be relevant and appropriate to the local, cultural and situational context. Children and young people should be meaningfully involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of transitional justice mechanisms. Their safety and well-being should underpin the design and implementation of all transitional justice mechanisms. Steps should be taken to limit re-traumatisation and respect the integrity of each individual child. All children who take part in these mechanisms, including those who have been associated with armed forces or armed groups, should be treated equally as witnesses

or as victims, in accordance with international human rights and legal standards.

14. **Inclusivity:** Some groups of children and young people are particularly affected by conflict but are often insufficiently or inappropriately acknowledged by transitional justice mechanisms, notably girls, those who are disabled, and young mothers. Appropriate measures should be taken to recognise and engage these groups and provide the requisite levels of support to all children; whether they were affected directly by trauma, or suffered indirectly through loss of opportunity caused by a lack of access to education and training, health care, adequate nutrition, etc. Mechanisms, including reparations and truth-seeking should endeavour to appropriately and realistically address the recovery and reintegration needs of all children and young people who have been affected by the conflict.

15. **Linkages with traditional practices:** Transitional Justice approaches should be relevant and appropriate to the local, cultural and situational circumstances, while building on experiences in other settings and recommendations from sources such as the Paris Principles and the Children and Transitional Justice Key Principles.

16. **Accountability:** Children accused of crimes under international law allegedly committed while they were associated with armed forces or armed groups should be considered primarily as victims of offences against international law; not only as perpetrators. Yet children and young people must be regarded as rights-holders with obligations, and thus should be encouraged to take responsibility for their actions in a safe and appropriate manner. In balancing such accountability and reintegration, the focus should be on restorative, rather than punitive, justice. Such measures should be in the best interests of the child and must be conducted in a manner that takes into account their age at the time of the alleged commission of the crime, promotes their sense of dignity and worth, and supports their reintegration and potential to assume a constructive role in society. They should also be accompanied by steps to sensitise communities about the experiences of all children and young people.

17. **Research:** steps should be taken to collect and share empirical research and best practices about:

- How to meaningfully involve children and young people in transitional justice processes in a way that best leads to effective reintegration; and
- The short and long-term impact of participation in transitional justice processes on children, young people and their communities.

18. **Acknowledgement:** Efforts should be made to individually acknowledge the involvement of children and young people in transitional justice processes, and to demonstrate to them the tangible results of their involvement.

19. **Evidence base:** There is a knowledge gap in how to better involve community members in prevention and reintegration work. Practitioners in this field must conduct systematic evaluations of their work in order to establish a strong body of approved evidence on successful reintegration outcomes for children and their communities.

III. Child Protection and Participation

20. **Active agents:** Children should be recognised as active agents in the recovery and reintegration process, with the key principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a basis:

- Non- discrimination
- The best interest of the child
- The right to survival and development
- Respect for the views of the child

21. **Meaningful participation:** Any recovery and reintegration project should give effect to the right of children to express their views on all

matters affecting them, ensuring meaningful participation in project design, implementation and evaluation, but also in decision making. Such participation must be in line with the Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment 12, which establishes the conditions for meaningful participation and dialogue involving both children and adults. An environment must be created that enables children to speak and be heard, taking into account different abilities or fear, and avoiding tokenistic participation or participation. Existing ethical principles and guidelines must be followed, particularly when reporting and communicating on work with children.

22. Training and procedures for State agents: Child Protection training should be provided and Standard Operating Procedures put in place and applied for all State officials (armed forces, police, health workers, emergency responders, intelligence agencies etc.) that operate in communities and have contact with children. Such training should have the Convention on the Rights of the Child and national child protection legislation as its foundation, and provide guidance to participants on how to prevent and respond to all forms of violence, neglect, abuse and exploitation against children, making use of the minimum standards on child protection in humanitarian action.

23. Duties and Responsibilities of children: Children and young people also have a role to play in working towards their successful recovery and reintegration. Paying due regard to children's ages and abilities, they should¹:

- Maintain a positive and respectful attitude towards community members;
- Be willing to get involved in development activities existing in the community, and be happy to go back to school and receive training if such opportunities exist;
- Uphold the positive values and standards of their community;
- Be open and ready to accept change.

¹ This recommendation was formulated in consultation with youth groups in Colombia and Uganda in August and September 2013.

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