Chapter 12

Children and Young People in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

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“Whoever wins the war children are always the losers and their lost childhood never comes back”.

Overview

Armed conflict affects the lives of children and young people, as well as their families, their communities and their nations. The actions - and inactions - of a range of security actors have a different impact on girls, boys, men and women given the distinct roles they play during war, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction. Research suggests that around half of all armed conflicts that have ended will re-emerge within ten years. Many post-conflict states are left in a state of fragile peace with no real closure of the issues. Understanding how children experience conflict, post-conflict and peace building – and through this how they view and experience both insecurity and security - is vital in interpreting short-term and long-term consequences on their development. What happens to children in their early years significantly determines the way they grow and develop and, in turn, their cost or contribution to society.

‘I can help bring peace in Northern Uganda if only my views are heard and acted upon. I don't hold a gun anymore; I hold the power of my voice. When visitors come to see us in the centers they normally ask us about our experiences and how we managed to escape… But, they should also be asking us how we can participate in the peace process ourselves because we also fought in the war.’

Source: Formerly abducted girl associated with rebel group, Northern Uganda.
This paper reflects on the importance of finding out and listening to the perspectives of children and young people who have lived through and experienced the insecurities of conflict and post-conflict situations. It emphasises the importance of children’s participation. That is, of creating the space for girls and boys of different ages and abilities to express their views and experiences, so that these can be heard, listened to and acted upon by a range of adults to further the realisation of children’s rights. In particular, it highlights the contributions of children to peace building efforts such as reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation which bring with them the hope of a more secure world. It supports arguments that security sector issues affecting children can be more effectively addressed through strengthening the existing security governance framework, in particular through reinforcing the human rights perspective of security.

By sharing children’s perspectives on insecurity and practical examples of children’s participation the authors hope that more actors – governments, civil society, the UN system and security actors – will:

- recognise the importance and value of listening to children’s perspectives;
- recognise the practical ways in which children participate, including examples of how children are – and can be – engaged in efforts to enhance their own protection and their community’s security at local and national levels; and,
- respond to the roles and responsibilities of children and support and help to strengthen their peace building initiatives, promote the inclusion of children’s voices in peace processes and make commitments to comprehensive plans of action to fulfil children’s rights in peace agreements.

Abuse of children contravenes human rights and international humanitarian law that entitle children to special protection in armed conflicts. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) requires the state and concerned agencies to ‘(….) take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict’. In the mid-1990s, Graça Machel’s report to the UN General Assembly on the impact of armed conflict on children stated: ‘Senior officers and soldiers alike must learn more about codes of behavior, humanitarian law and, especially, about the fundamental rights of children’. The CRC is the most ratified convention in the world. It outlines the responsibility of the state and other duty bearers, including a wide range of
security sector actors, to ensure the protection of children’s rights to survival, protection, development and participation. Children’s rights are human rights and apply to all children regardless of age, gender, race, colour, country of origin, religion, physical or mental dis/ability, or socio-economic background. Children’s rights are part of a complete package and cannot be ‘cherry-picked’ according to what is convenient, palatable or preferred. Each of the rights set out in the CRC interrelate to each other. Participation goes hand-in-hand with protection, development and survival. The full set of children’s rights is equally applicable whether during times of violent conflict or peace. Key principles which guide implementation of the UNCRC include: children’s right to life, non-discrimination, children’s participation in decisions affecting them (with respect to their evolving capacity), and decision making in children’s best interests.

In accordance with the CRC framework, in this paper the term children refers to all children and young people under the age of 18 years. However, 'children' are not a homogeneous group and girls and boys of different ages will have different perspectives and experiences relating to their priority security concerns, which may also vary according to their socio-cultural-political context. Children’s ‘evolving capacity’ is linked both to children’s development – to age and dis/ability - as well as to opportunities, and to exposure to opportunities, in their local context. As will be elaborated in this paper, it is crucial to recognise the diversity of children’s experiences and to create opportunities for the views and opinions of children of all age groups to be heard.

A range of security sector actors, directly involved in conflict, post-conflict and peace building, all have roles and responsibilities to respect and protect children’s rights. In their efforts to secure protection for all civilians and to meet security governance benchmarks it is crucial that these actors give increased recognition to children and young people. To understand how children and young people are affected by conflict, which of their rights are being violated, what roles they take on, what they learn, and how they feel they can be supported - it is crucial that their views and experiences are heard. Listening to the views of girls and boys can lead to their better protection. Their perspectives should therefore inform security sector activities and reforms. And, as children in Afghanistan remind us, children’s role as agents of peace can be best fostered when the younger generation is engaged with a focus on their potential and their priorities.

‘If you are involved in bringing security to Afghanistan, talk to us to hear why we feel afraid or why we feel safe in a place... If you are

involved in community development, make sure you listen to what we think our communities need. We look forward to contributing to a greater society, where adults and children work together and are respected by one another.


1. Understanding and Responding to Children’s Perspectives and Priorities

a) Risks and dangers for children in armed conflict and insecure situations

In situations of armed conflict and insecurity children may have been identified and acknowledged as victims, but they are rarely engaged as social actors with their own views, beliefs and contributions, either by their communities, governments, wider civil society, the UN system or security actors. Girls’ and boys’ roles and contributions to their families, communities and nation are generally unrecognised, and often undermined. In efforts to protect children and families, or to make communities safe, security actors have neglected to take into account the different perspectives that children and young people have of what constitute priority issues. However, in recent years the importance of engaging with children as social actors and the need to understand and respond to the political and social reality of children’s lives has been highlighted by a number of practitioners and academics.

It is increasingly recognised that children have their own very valuable perspectives and priorities – which are often very different to adults. For example, during Save the Children’s rapid assessment of child protection concerns in Northern Uganda in 2006, children living in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) expressed more fear of abuse and harassment faced at the hands of the Government army who were meant to protect them, than they did of the Lords Resistance Army rebel forces. In post-Taliban Afghanistan, in exploring dangers and risks faced and ideas to create a safe environment in Kabul in 2002-2003, children prioritised concerns of road safety and were supported in child led initiatives to train traffic police and raise awareness of road safety amongst children. In Sri Lanka and Zambia groups of children have prioritised concerns relating to insecurity and domestic violence caused as a result of their parents (mostly fathers) excessive use of alcohol, and have lobbied for restricted opening
Children’s priorities often reflect concerns and challenges grounded in their day to day reality rather than more distant fears or worries.

The need to recognise children and young people as social and political beings is also evident. For example, while some children are forced into their association with armed forces through violence, threats and abduction, or compelled due to poverty, Drummond-Mundal and Cave stress how it must not be assumed that all children involved in armed conflict are manipulated by adults. Western concepts of childhood as a time of innocence, dependency and powerlessness need to be challenged if we are to find ways to divert children and young people from violent action to non-violent action for positive social change.

In situations of violent conflict, faced by threats to their survival and development – from which adults may not be able to protect them – children may resort to a range of strategies, including engagement in political-military action. For example, Hart describes how children in the Occupied Palestine Territories are ‘often willing participants in the national struggle. Their political consciousness is developed to an extent and from an age that commonly takes outsiders by surprise. They also display great awareness of their role, as children, in the effort to influence public opinion through the media’. Reynolds makes a similar observation in relation to children in South Africa choosing to take part in the struggle against apartheid – she stresses that they took ‘profoundly serious political and moral decisions in relation to their own safety and ambitions, as well as the safety and interests of their families’.

Children may also engage in a variety of other actions to protect themselves, their families, peers and communities. Examples from Guatemala, Nepal and Uganda illustrate this point further in Section 3 of this paper below.

b) Capturing the perspectives of children

Listening to children, taking their views seriously, and recognising the various roles and responsibilities taken on by girls and boys (within their families, communities and in broader society) requires a change in the way that most adults perceive children and engage with them. Adults, including security sector actors, need to recognise the capacities and contributions that girls and boys (of different ages, abilities and backgrounds) can make and be prepared to share information and engage with them in more constructive ways.
In their daily lives children often take on a variety of roles and responsibilities outside of the house. During situations of violent conflict children may face increased risks while undertaking these responsibilities – for example, the risk of sexual harassment, abduction into armed forces and/or the danger of landmines. Others may be obliged to take on additional roles and responsibilities as a result of violent conflict because, for example, the adult (usually male) head of the household is absent. In addition, as has been highlighted above, children may choose to be directly involved in various socio-political-armed activities in their communities and broader society.

Genuine children’s participation generally requires a commitment of time to a process in which girls and boys are given space to express their views on matters that concern them. Children’s participation in practice means, for example, supporting children to form groups in their local communities, within their schools or in other settings so that they can come together and talk about real issues that affect them. Support from local adults is crucial, especially in initial efforts to create space for children to express their views within their communities and to build local ownership of their participation initiatives. Local child focused non-government organisations (NGOs) often take on the role of facilitators to prepare adults (for example, parents, community and religious leaders, teachers) to take children and their views seriously. Adult support and guidance is also important to help children assert their rights. Children can be supported to build their capacity to speak out (to lose their ‘fear’ of participating), to analyse issues of importance to them and to take appropriate action.

Examples of children’s participation are many and varied and include, among others: action in support of the right to education for out of school children and the development of a Code of Conduct for teachers and students (Nepal); preventing violence in school through the establishment of school councils (Zambia); action around protection issues including reporting on violations of their rights (Angola), action against violence and sexual abuse (Cambodia) and against corporal punishment and early marriages (Nepal); and, support to and care for children affected by HIV/AIDS (Zimbabwe). Through their own and adult-supported media initiatives children have undertaken awareness raising on discrimination and punishment (Afghanistan), have influenced local and national policy making by presenting their concerns on their rights to presidential candidates (Nicaragua) and, their proposals to the interim constitution (Nepal), including issues such as the right to education, protection and health, name and nationality.
c) Children’s Role in ‘keeping safe’

As will be illustrated by this paper, providing children with a regular space to organise their own groups and initiatives can enhance children’s confidence and skills to identify, analyse and initiate action and advocacy initiatives around concerns affecting their security and protection. Through their collective initiatives children are also in a stronger position to negotiate with adults with regard to any roles which are inappropriate or damaging to their age and development.  

For example, girls in Nepal have identified unsafe places and sought support and protection from community leaders to create safer places in their neighbourhood and schools. This project was conceived of by a group of girls from various ethnic backgrounds, with the support of adult facilitators from NGOs. Initially the girls were supported to undertake surveys to map the places in their community that they felt were unsafe for them. The school, the road, the public transport system, the cinema, the public tap where they collected water on a daily basis were all found to be unsafe. The girls collected evidence of harassment and the impacts on them. The girls also received some training in facilitation, communication and leadership skills from the NGO adult facilitators. The girls developed recommendations to make these places safer and then used them to negotiate with key persons – such as the cinema manager – to make the spaces safer for girls. The girls also provided support to other girls who have suffered abuse or harassment to make sure that they were not made to feel guilty or isolated. Such peer support was crucial in helping to rebuild self esteem, confidence and morale. Building upon the success of this initial project, it has now been implemented through schools in other districts with the involvement of both boys and girls. Adult support groups including guardians, teachers, locally elected officials, and representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations have been formed in the project areas or in the schools to respond to children’s concerns.

In many different contexts creative participatory tools such as risk mapping to understand where girls and boys feel safe and unsafe, and body mapping to explore children’s experiences of conflict or post-conflict can also be used to help children’s perspectives to be shared and acted upon. For example, risk mapping undertaken by a girl’s representative from conflict affected Northern Uganda highlighted the dangers of walking to the well to collect water due to fears of abduction or landmines. In contrast the girls felt safest in schools as many children are present in school and they were able to share their experiences and support each other.
The situation of children can be a sensitive indicator of change and should be of direct interest to security sector actors at all levels. For example, if children and their parents feel it is too unsafe to travel to school and/or to remain in school this may be an early warning of other problems.

2. Ethical Issues and Challenges

In any participation process, but perhaps especially when working in insecure environments, there are many ethical issues and challenges involved in working with children in participatory ways. Hart and Tyrer note how the ‘environment of armed conflict poses particular challenges for safe, ethically responsible research involving children’. They emphasise the need for good preparation and the need to be aware of and anticipate possible risks beforehand and have strategies to deal with them. Ethical issues can be better understood and better addressed by listening and responding to local people’s ideas (children and adults) which build upon
their understanding of the local socio-cultural, political context. In this way, strengthening local ownership of participatory initiatives contributes to ethical practice.

At the beginning of any process, a framework to ensure ethical, meaningful and inclusive participation practice with and for girls and boys should be established. This may mean, among other issues:

- ensuring that practice standards on children’s participation are used and implemented;
- developing child friendly information and participatory tools, including use of local forms of cultural expression such as poetry, drama, and songs;
- ensuring that the full diversity and range of children’s experiences are captured;
- ensuring that issues which reflect or reinforce child-adult power relations are dealt with, such as making sure that children have the space to express their own views and ensuring that adults do not dominate, dictate or manipulate these views;
- exploring discrimination and ensuring that non-discrimination is practiced;
- ensuring that child protection issues are dealt with appropriately and sensitively;
- exploring possible risks faced when working with children in conflict situations and ensuring that children face no harm as a result of their participation;
- ensuring that there is a process of continuous reflection and action planning resulting in quality, ethical and inclusive child participation practice;
- ensuring that children’s perspectives inform action planning both at local levels (where impact may be more immediate for some children), and at national policy and practice levels;
- ensuring wider accountability – preparing adults to acknowledge the capacities of children, and to respond and act upon them.

Children’s experiences of childhood are diverse and are affected by gender, dis/ability, level of family income, ethnicity, culture, geography, socio-political context and other factors. In addition, children's evolving capacities mean that the level and nature of participation of a five year old will be very different to that of a seventeen year old, although the CRC’s reference to
'due-weight' in accordance with the age and maturity of the child, means that the views of a five year old in relation to what makes them feel safe and unsafe are equally important and can equally be elicited and acted upon.

The diversity of children’s experiences of armed conflict and post-conflict needs to be adequately explored and reflected so that:

- there is a better understanding of the experiences, reflections, views and aspirations of both boys and girls in different contexts;
- some of the most marginalised groups of children are supported to share their experiences and views.

Additional efforts may be required to encourage groups of children who typically suffer discrimination – non-school going children, refugee and internally displaced children, children with different abilities/disabilities, children formerly associated with armed or military groups – to have equal opportunities to be involved. Children themselves should be encouraged to reflect on who is included in, and excluded from, their participatory and peace initiatives.

Save the Children has developed practice standards through years of experience supporting children’s participation at local, national and global levels (see box 12.2). The primary purpose of these practice standards is to ensure consistent, high quality child participation practice. They aim to provide a framework that gives guidance and direction first and foremost to field staff and partners in continuously improving their participatory practice.

Child protection goes hand-in-hand with and is integral to good child participation practice. The use of codes of conduct, particularly when developed in consultation with girls and boys as well as their parents and guardians within community settings, can be useful as they help to identify behaviour and good practice to make sure that children’s participation takes place within safe and respectful environments. Such codes of conduct should include procedures to both protect children from risks and potential exploitation and abuse, as well as sensitive procedures to deal appropriately and effectively with possible disclosures of harm or abuse. This includes the need to identify in advance local organisations and/or individuals who have skills to provide psycho-social support to children who have faced traumatic experiences – particularly when working with children who live in insecure environments caused by armed conflict. In all situations the principle of ‘the best interests of the child’ should guide decisions with regard to what are and
are not appropriate activities for children of different ages and abilities to engage in.

**Box 12.2: Save the Children Alliance Practice Standards in Children’s Participation (2005)**

**Standard 1: An Ethical Approach:** Transparency, Honesty and Accountability - Adult organisations and workers are committed to ethical participatory practice and to the primacy of children’s best interests.

**Standard 2: Children’s Participation is Relevant and Voluntary** - Children participate in processes and address issues that affect them - either directly or indirectly - and have the choice as to whether to participate or not.

**Standard 3: A Child Friendly, Enabling Environment** - Children experience a safe, welcoming and encouraging environment for their participation.

**Standard 4: Equality of Opportunity** - Child participation work challenges and does not reinforce existing patterns of discrimination and exclusion. It encourages those groups of children who typically suffer discrimination and who are often excluded from activities to be involved in participatory processes.

**Standard 5: Staff are Effective and Confident** - Adult staff and managers involved in supporting/facilitating children’s participation are trained and supported to do their jobs to a high standard.

**Standard 6: Participation Promotes the Safety and Protection of Children** - Child protection policies and procedures form an essential part of participatory work with children.

**Standard 7: Ensuring Follow-up and Evaluation** - Respect for children’s involvement is indicated by a commitment to provide feedback and/or follow-up and to evaluate the quality and impact of children’s participation.

Local NGOs and community groups are therefore often in the best position to regularly engage with children and young people, and to support them in raising their issues to the local authorities or to other security sector actors. Local and international NGOs and the UN can also support opportunities for children’s voices to be heard in peace processes and efforts to develop comprehensive plans of action to fulfil children’s rights in peace agreements. This will require the establishment of child friendly structures and processes for communication and dialogue between children and adult actors.
3. Security Actors Responding to Children’s Perspectives and Experiences

Awareness raising, training and capacity building initiatives with different security actors are critical, as paradoxically the rights of the most marginalised groups of children living in insecure contexts, including internally displaced and refugee children, street and working children and trafficked children, are often most violated by security actors who have state powers to protect them - such as the military, police, and border security guards.

In government camps, squatter areas and relocation areas in Khartoum, Sudan for internally displaced people (IDPs) – the lives of children and their families are characterised by insecurity and marginalisation, with gross violation and denial of their rights by state security actors. During an inter-agency situation assessment\textsuperscript{31} in which focus group discussions and mind map drawings with children were used to elicit children's views, girls and boys highlighted the manner in which their IDP families were subjected to regular raids, harassment, demolition and forced relocation by the law enforcing agencies. Some older children, women and men were also arbitrarily arrested and unlawfully detained during the demolitions.

Box 12.3: Children’s Mind Map drawings, Khartoum:

The children see guns and people with guns as potential threats and they feel insecure in the IDP camps and in the squatter areas, especially after the riot of 1\textsuperscript{st} August 2005. Some children want to carry guns in order to take revenge on the people and Law Enforcing Agencies who have killed, harassed or detained their family member. Some children want to become police.

The implications that today's security actions can have on tomorrow's security situation need to be more clearly understood and given careful consideration, especially in terms of their impact on children. Demolition of their shelter and forced relocations have had a detrimental impact on livelihoods, family integrity, children’s education, and general well-being interfering with their rights to life, dignity, liberty and security. The agencies involved in undertaking the assessment are involved in advocacy efforts with relevant government ministries to try to address children’s concerns.

Strengthening the role of the local police to protect and fulfil children’s rights and creating positive linkages between the police and child
focused community level initiatives are required to improve security sector interventions – particularly in terms of harnessing children's perspectives on security and developing responses that are appropriate. Initiatives to establish Child Protection Units (CPU) within local police stations in Ethiopia and Kenya with strong linkages (and referral mechanisms) to local community based structures, local NGOs, international NGOs and to the relevant ministries\(^3\) have been effective in ensuring more appropriate responses to children’s care and protection needs, particularly when working with children who have come into conflict with the law. In Kenya, better relationships between children and the police were reported: ‘In the four CPUs, police officers treat children more humanely, pay more respect to their rights and opinions and provide better separate facilities for boys and girls. CPU officers wear civilian clothes, use friendly language, are more child-focused and do not assume children are criminals’. Understanding and responding to the diversity of children’s perspectives and experiences is a step towards addressing their specific needs and rights. Children living in situations of armed conflict and post-conflict will have their own priorities. For example, during a global evaluation of children affected by armed conflict, displacement or disaster the priorities identified by children included: protection from abduction and from being used as soldiers and sex slaves; protection from other forms of abuse, from hunger and disease; the importance of access to education and health services at all times (even in the midst of conflict); peace and reconciliation; projects that build on children’s self esteem, provide hope and which reduce stigma; support to families to relieve poverty and conflict; fair distribution of aid; and opportunities to participate and be heard.\(^3\)

International military peacekeeping forces, UN observers and UN civilian police have an important mandate and presence to monitor, prevent, report and respond to abuse and exploitation faced by girls and boys during conflict. Protecting civilians is one of the most important tasks of peacekeeping forces. However protection issues affecting children are often neglected. To address such neglect, training opportunities for armed peacekeepers, observers and civilian police on issues relating to children’s rights have grown in recent years.\(^3\) For example, training of military and peace-keeping forces on child rights and protection has been undertaken by Save the Children in Sweden, East and West Africa.
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“Before we took part in the Save the Children Sweden’s training programme we always referred to civilians as a single entity, without seeing children as a group in need of special protection.”
Source: Soldier, southern Sudan.36

In Uganda Save the Children has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Defence which spells out their respective roles. This includes the role of Save the Children as a ‘watch dog’ to monitor the military vis-à-vis their role in protecting and respecting children’s rights, and in supporting the training of the Uganda military (UPDF).37 Save the Children in Uganda (SCIU) has undertaken training on child rights, including the Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and child protection with hundreds of senior army officers, and with more than 10,000 soldiers from the Local Defence Units (LDU). The overall aim of the co-operation with the military has been to strengthen UPDF’s capacity to protect children and respect children's rights and to mainstream child rights into the policies and structures of the UPDF.

The main achievements have included the establishment of a human rights desk within the UPDF structure at a national level and the establishment of Child Protection Units (CPU) at local levels to respond in practical ways to child protection issues, including to children abducted by the rebel forces.

In terms of the ‘watch dog’ role, SCIU and their NGO partner staff have been involved in monitoring cases of child right violations by UPDF forces, especially at local levels. There have been practical cases in which SCIU have identified underage children employed as child soldiers within UPDF. In such cases SCIU, in collaboration with UNICEF, have taken action to ensure that the young person is removed from the army. However, in general, the task of monitoring and reporting is very sensitive as local staff may be intimidated by UPDF soldiers. To ensure anonymity in reporting, and responses from high level management, reports by local staff are shared directly with the SCIU Head Office in Kampala who reports directly to senior staff within the Government. However, a lack of effective documentation of cases and fears of intimidation remain a challenge. In addition, accountability mechanisms in terms of how the Government respond to and follow up on the reports need to be substantially strengthened.

At a global level, the Security Council has followed up advocacy recommendations to appoint Child Protection Advisers (CPAs) in...
peacekeeping missions. CPAs currently operate in some of Africa’s most war-affected countries including Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola. The role of CPAs includes the provision of training for all mission personnel on child rights and protection, as explicitly requested by the Security Council, as well as systematic reporting on children's concerns in all country-specific reports to the Council. The child protection adviser serves also as a contact-point and interlocutor on issues related to children between peacekeeping operations and United Nations country teams, NGOs working to protect children, national Governments and civil society groups, supporting and complementing work, in particular the work of UNICEF, on the ground.

In understanding situations of armed conflict and insecurity from children’s perspective, the significance of gang and gun cultures has been highlighted by children and young people in different parts of the world, particularly in South, Central and North America. A cycle of violence and insecurity is perpetuated by gang and gun culture, as children have to be tough in order to survive. In Honduras a community-based model for the prevention of violence has been developed to support gang members’ reintegration and rehabilitation in the city of San Pedro Sula. Together with its partner organisations, Save the Children UK has set out to address the lack of understanding and mechanisms to promote a positive community response to the gang phenomenon and to support gang members who want to withdraw from their gangs. Awareness-raising is being undertaken with key actors - including the government, the police, the judiciary and the public – to support reintegration efforts and to stop the killing of young people by police and security forces. Generation X, a youth-led organisation, has been developed enabling peer support and ex-gang members access to education, vocational training, employment opportunities and psychosocial support programmes. Training has also been provided for community police who are a relatively new department of the Honduran Preventive Police.

**4. The Role of Children as Agents of Peace and of their Own Protection**

This section of the paper focuses on the contributions that children and young people can make to peacebuilding and the creation of a protective environment for girls and boys. When working towards a vision of peace, conflict transformation and peacebuilding efforts are important strategies to minimise and address violent conflict and insecurity which negatively affect the lives of children and their families.
Peace is life and survival. It is to live in our houses and sleep without being displaced. It is reflected in how we treat each other and how we work and live. It is to respect each others silence and listen to each others song; to respect and realise that every single human being has got a worth. It is having social order and freedom of opinion; and having a government.
Source: Children’s description of peace.  

There are many examples that illustrate how living through violent times has strengthened girls and boys’ aspirations for peace. In many contexts children condemn violence and urge that it be replaced by peaceful and caring ways of resolving conflict. Some practitioners have suggested that children and youth may have unique contributions to make to peacebuilding by virtue of their stage of development: ‘(The) transitional state (of youth) is regarded as valuable for initiating change at the grassroots level, which can, in turn, affect peace processes on higher levels’.  

Also, as articulated by Drummond Mundal and Cave: ‘Social and political inclusion of children, in particular youth, in conflict transformation and peace building makes pragmatic and constructive sense. These young people may have experience and capacities that can either work for or against new social and political constructions. For peace to be sustainable, the adults of tomorrow need to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the creation and maintenance of a climate of peace’.  

Children are participating in peace building initiatives and contributing to peace across the world, even in some of the most insecure – or formerly insecure – contexts. Children’s participation can help children to build upon their own resilience and make changes in their lives. ‘It makes you feel useful, you can help others, you can be an actor’. Meaningful participation and space to come together with their peers, to share their experiences and express their views can give children strength and increase their life skills and self-confidence. Participation and association are part of a process which helps children to promote their rights and fight for social justice.  

‘I stayed alone, with no parents. I used to think about the past. It was difficult to forget what happened to me in the bush. I felt alone. No one wanted to stay with me, to share with me. I then joined an association and began to find peace within myself. My family came back to me. I have friends and I have learned from others. These days I am fine. I know what to do at the right time and right place’.  
Source: Formerly abducted child soldier, Northern Uganda.
Children can actively contribute to peace in a myriad of ways: through rebuilding social relationships, contributing to a culture of peace and rebuilding social structures. Their contributions play a role in enhancing security, in reconciliation, in the search for truth and justice, in rebuilding education, the economy and livelihoods. For example, in Sierra Leone, Guatemala and South Africa, children have participated in Truth commissions, contributing to justice restoration. Children in Angola, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Uganda participate in demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration processes. In the northern conflict-affected region of Uganda, children’s peace clubs and associations within schools and communities are using song, traditional dance, debates and radio programmes to create messages and action for peace. The associations (which include formerly abducted children) also support reintegration activities by helping to prepare families and communities to receive their sons or daughters/community members who were formerly abducted children. The children’s representatives are also advocating for space to include children in the formal peace talks so that the views and experiences of girls and boys, including formerly abducted children, many of them with experiences as soldiers, may be heard and acted upon. This is seen as an important step to increase action towards the fulfilment of children’s rights.

In Guatemala, the indigenous Mayan communities were first and foremost the ones who suffered death, displacement, disappearances and torture during the 36 years of internal armed conflict. Children suffered the same treatment as adults since they were viewed as future guerrilla members. Despite the fact that peace accords were signed by the government in 1996, the current generation is still affected by the experiences of conflict. However, children and young people acting as youth promoters in their communities are contributing to building peace by providing training on conflict resolution to other children and young people. Children are also taking part in the process of piecing together the history of the violent conflict to ensure that the memory of it does not get lost.

In Nepal, the conflict between the Government and Maoist rebels since 1995 has negatively impacted children and adults in communities, particularly in the period between 2001-2006. In October 2006 a peace agreement was reached and processes are underway to establish a Federal Government. During the conflict period children, together with adult partners including government officials, have implemented the concept of children as zones of peace (CZOP). Children as Zones of Peace has led to various initiatives including: the formation of a national Coalition for CZOP;
a public commitment by five major political parties to respect children as zones of peace; the issuance of child protection guidelines for security forces by the Prime Minister’s Office; and, the announcement by the Government that schools are also zones of peace. Such initiatives have been initiated as the Maoist rebels have been targeting schools and Child Clubs to organise Maoist propaganda programmes and to lure students and teachers to their cause. At the community level children and child clubs have successfully negotiated with both warring parties not to involve children, not to use or involve schools in the conflict, and not to interfere in the work of Children’s Clubs. The CZOP initiative in Nepal also contributes towards efforts by the Government to establish comprehensive child protection systems (from community to district to national levels). Village child protection committees (VCPCs) have been formed to identify and address child care and protection issues at the local level. Children’s representatives from the Child Clubs are part of such VCPCs. In addition, district level Child Club Forums have been established to share information, undertake joint advocacy and elect representatives for district level structures, including the District Child Welfare Boards. At the national level concerned Ministries are currently developing a Child Protection Policy and have made commitments to ensure space for children to inform policy developments. In addition, processes are underway to support space for children’s voices and children’s rights to be heard and reflected in the constitutional assembly.

5. Adult’s Supporting Children’s Peace Initiatives

Adult support to children’s contributions to peace building and to the development and strengthening of their own initiatives is crucial. Children will benefit from encouragement and practical support from their parents, teachers, community elders, non-government organisations and government actors, including security actors. For example, as outlined above, adults can support the establishment and strengthening of structures such as children’s peace clubs, child protection committees and children as zones of peace. This support may take place at different levels. At the local level adults (from local NGOs, local government, schools or community leaders) may facilitate children’s groups and networks to meet together and develop peace initiatives. Non-government organisations may provide children with practical resources (for example, a basic fund for materials and transport), with relevant information (for example, a child friendly version of relevant government policies or legislation) and skill training (for example, training
on children’s rights, life skills, conflict-resolution). Links to existing media organisations such as radio stations or news journalists may support the development and integration of child led media initiatives (for example, radio programs, newsletters, children’s articles in mainstream newspaper) to increase dissemination of children’s views and advocacy messages. One such initiative – the Children’s Radio Manifesto\textsuperscript{51} - builds on the understanding that radio can help transform conflict and can support children and young people’s efforts as peace builders within their communities.

For children and young people the issues and concerns affecting them are most clearly manifested at the local level. Many of the case examples shared above illustrate how children’s more direct contributions to peace and to their own protection have mostly taken place in projects at the local level that are rarely scaled-up to the national level. This limits the impact of children’s contributions in terms of political process, and should be seen as a missed opportunity in terms of contributing to sustainable peace, which has to build on the social relationships of mutual trust and respect at all levels - in families and communities, in schools and working places, at district and regional level. Children’s contributions and impact at local and community levels are therefore very important, especially in terms of protection responses and reconciliation processes. Nosworthy suggests:

\textquote{Civil society and local authorities will be the prime actors in recognising and responding to [young people’s] protection needs. The notion of ‘local ownership’, central to security sector governance, means encouraging pro-active engagement and dialogue, including with youth, in the identification and resolution of local security problems…This engagement in local security agendas between young people, civil society and the local authorities can subsequently be directed and used in informing and influencing national security agendas in a meaningful way}.\textsuperscript{52}

The challenge remains to ensure government policy makers and the range of security actors respond to a commonly expressed priority of children who have lived through violence, insecurity and efforts to build peace: \textit{to be able to influence peace processes at every level including the national level}.

Adult civil society organisations can cooperate in identifying and providing the arrangements and conditions needed to support children and young people to speak with decision-makers at various levels. They can find ways to build and strengthen children and young people’s groups at local, sub-national and national levels so that regular or permanent cross-
generational dialogue forums can be established between government and
groups of young people’s representatives which, in turn, can create national
ongoing inter-generational dialogue. Such representative structures imply
structural changes and more long term processes. They can play a role in
committing adults in terms of their accountability to children and open up
space for more sustainable peace initiatives. Through such representative
structures children’s views can begin to more systematically influence the
development of peace agreements, comprehensive peace plans and/or efforts
to monitor and report back on progress made towards the implementation of
such agreements or plans.

6. Moving Forward through Strengthening Accountability

In child rights terms, accountability to children and young people means that
adult decision makers take action which responds to children’s concerns,
priorities and recommendations about violence, security and peace, and
which ensure the fulfilment of children’s rights to protection, participation,
development and survival. Adult duty bearers (including parents, teachers,
civil society organisations, government officials, police, military, private
security actors, UN etc.) have responsibilities to protect children’s rights.
Increasing the available opportunities for listening to children, sharing
information with them in accessible ways, and providing feedback to
children about how their views and recommendations have (or have not
been) addressed are mechanisms which reflect accountability to children.

Such mechanisms need to be specifically identified and developed
within the process of security sector reform to engage security sector actors
and strengthen their accountability towards children and young people.
Adherence to international human rights treaties, including the United
Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, must be integral to such
efforts, as experience shows that children’s needs and rights are not
adequately considered. The importance of developing clear management and
reporting mechanisms are essential to ensure systems of accountability
which may hold to account any security actor (private or state) who violates
human rights or child rights standards. The increasing privatisation of
security services by government agencies could further complicate the
process of ensuring accountability.

As was illustrated earlier in this paper, the training of security sector
actors including the police, judiciary, border control officers, military groups
and private security actors on children’s rights, children’s protection, gender
awareness and children’s participation is very important. It helps to ensure recognition of children, to enhance security sector actors’ knowledge, skills and values towards the fulfilment of children’s rights and the importance of taking into consideration children’s views. Child focused NGOs, local or international, can play an important role in providing such training and monitoring its impact. Advocacy to institutionalise children’s rights training within the training curricula for all military, police, border control and security guard personnel should continue so that such efforts are mainstreamed. Existing good practice mechanisms could be scaled up and expanded, including the appointment of Child Protection Advisers (CPAs) in peace keeping missions and the training of key security sector actors.

In addition to training of security sector actors and the appointment of CPAs, the establishment of child friendly complaints procedures would contribute to accountability mechanisms - allowing child or adult civilians to report any complaints with regards to any violations of their rights by security actors which should be systematically and sensitively followed up. In addition, the Child Protection Advisers should undertake pro-active efforts to ensure that the views and experiences of girls and boys are incorporated in reports of the Special Representative and Special Rapporteurs to be heard in the UN Security Council.

The development of comprehensive child protection systems, including the formation of child protection committees in communities and at district and national levels, would also enhance holistic, sustainable efforts towards children’s care, protection and participation. At each level children and young people should be supported to form their own groups and initiatives (including peace initiatives) so that girls and boys (of different ages, and backgrounds) can identify and address key security and protection issues affecting them and elect their own representatives to be part of the protection committees at each level. In particular, children and young people can identify and ensure a response to protection, security and peace issues which affect them at the local level. A review of national legislation, policies and practice should be undertaken in order to build a more effective child protection system which incorporates children’s suggestions to better protect girls and boys and to hold perpetrators of violence against children accountable.

Capacity building initiatives with children on life skills, conflict-resolution, organisational development and peacebuilding could also be scaled up to support the strengthening of child led organisations and initiatives. Child led media initiatives and partnerships with mainstream
media institutions (including radio, newspaper and TV) can also be proactively supported to increase awareness raising with and by children and young people around their concerns and messages. Media can be a practical and powerful way to raise and amplify the voices of children and to help adults to recognise children’s capacities and potential as change agents.

**Linkages and partnerships between children’s groups and other civil society groups** that engage in security, protection and peace initiatives (at local, sub-national and national levels) should also be encouraged to exchange knowledge and strategies to promote and support children and young people’s role as agents of peace. As highlighted in this paper local civil society organisations are often best placed to support practical responses to children’s priority concerns, especially when partnerships with local authorities have been established.

In addition, entry points for dialogue with both government and security providers should be explored and key interlocutors identified and engaged. Inter-generational dialogue forums between the government and groups of children’s representatives could be established at local, district, national levels to support children and young people to influence the development, implementation and monitoring of government policies and practices which affect their security, including peacebuilding activities and national action plans.

### 7. Concluding Remarks

Children are longing for peace. This message can be clearly heard from children living in violent situations and insecurity. To respond to this message, children should be protected and empowered as agents of peace. In addition, mechanisms must be found and implemented to ensure that children’s rights are respected even, and especially, in situations of armed and violent conflict as well as in efforts towards comprehensive peace building. When talking about and acting upon security issues, it is crucial that all actors understand and respond to the different ways in which girls and boys of different ages and abilities are affected by violent conflict and insecurity. Continual efforts are needed to ensure that the actions of security actors have a positive impact on the lives of girls, boys, women and men through the promotion and protection of children’s rights as an integral part of efforts to fulfil human rights in war, peace building and post-conflict reconstruction. Ongoing efforts are also needed to ensure that children and young people play a role in taking forward peace rather than conflict. As
expressed in the quote from a formerly abducted girl associated with the rebel group in Northern Uganda, shared at the outset of this paper – we should listen and act upon children’s views. We should support the power of children’s voices, and not the power of the gun.

Children, while being bearers of rights and representing a significant proportion of any society, have little or no access to political process. It is therefore incumbent on those in positions of authority to both acknowledge and respond to the concerns of children and to begin to transform relationships between adults and children so that children and children’s groups can be recognised and engaged as important actors in civil society processes. When children are recognised as civil society actors, when they feel that their views are being listened to and taken into account, when they feel their concerns and aspirations are being addressed, only then will their rights be realised, and their full potential as active agents within society be recognised.

In instances where community based child protection systems have been established, children have been able to send their own representatives to report on violations affecting their rights. Collaboration between children and adult representatives, including representatives from local authorities, allow more systematic and appropriate response to children’s concerns. At district and national level children’s perspectives should also be heard and acknowledged. Opportunities for the meaningful engagement of different civil society organisations in decision-making should be supported at all levels. This includes creating genuine opportunities for children to inform, influence and monitor all peace related initiatives and actions at local, national and global levels, including formal peace building processes.

This paper is intended as one contribution to these efforts by bringing children and young people’s perspectives and actions on transforming conflicts and working towards reconciliation and peace to the attention of a wider audience and sensitising ‘all concerned to stop war and bring peace for the sake of … children as captured in the song from children in Nepal below.
Box 12.4 Song by Children in Nepal

We tell everyone time and again we are children, let us live in peace.  
This is the time for us to grow, learn and get an education.  
Please do not involve us in playing with bombs, firearms and explosive things.  
Education is our right.  
The whole village, all places are shaken by bombs  
What is the future for us?  
We are without proper clothes, are lost, displaced and orphaned  
Why is this happening to us?  
We tell everybody concerned to stop it.  
We want to hold books and pens in our hands, not guns.  
Peace talks are going on. It is said there will be peace, killing will be stopped  
Let us try our best, let’s bring our peace rallies,  
And sensitize all concerned to stop war and bring peace for the sake of us children  
We are the children of Nepal.

Acknowledgements:

We would like to acknowledge contributions from Save the Children’s Practice Exchange Network on children’s participation and child protection in emergencies; as well as country teams who are participating in Save the Children Norway’s Thematic Evaluation on Children’s Participation in Armed Conflict, Post Conflict and Peacebuilding, Guatemala, Uganda, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Nepal. We also appreciated information from Elizabeth Jareg and useful feedback from Jo de Berry and from David Nosworthy.

Endnotes

1 Participant from Nepal quoted in Save the Children Norway, Building peace out of war. (Oslo: Workshop Report 2005), www.reddbarna.no/default.asp?HMFILE=42817
2 The term ‘children’ refers to all persons below the age of 18, including children and young people.


The UNCRC has been ratified by all countries in the world except two, the USA and Somalia.


Karen O’Kane, Children and Young People as Citizens. Lansdown, Can You Hear Me?

Informal discussion between SC assessment team members and one of the authors, autumn 2006.

Claire O’Kane, Clare Feinstein and Annette Giertsen

16 M. Brown, Global Evaluation: Children Affected by Armed Conflict, Displacement or Disaster (CADC), (Save the Children Norway, 2005). Zambia case example shared by a Children’s Christian Fund (CCF) adviser to one of the authors March 2007.

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24 Save the Children Norway, Thematic Evaluation on Children’s Participation in Armed Conflict.

25 Save the Children Norway, Thematic Evaluation on Children’s Participation in Armed Conflict – with permission given by the young person representative for reproduction of this risk map in this article.

26 Hart and Tyrer, Research with Children Living in Conflict Situations, 18.

27 For example, Save the Children have developed practice standards in children’s participation which cut across all work with children. The practice standards are downloadable from www.savethechildren.net


30 see for example Save the Children, Code of Conduct for Save the Children Staff, (2005).


32 Florence Martin and John Parry-Williams, The Right Not To Lose Hope. Children in Conflict with the Law, (International Save the Children Alliance, 2005).

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34 Brown, Global Evaluation.

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36 Ibid.

37 Information received by email from an SCD colleague Lene Steffen May 2007.

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38 Martin and Parry-Williams, *The Right Not To Lose Hope.*
39 Ibid.
40 Save the Children Norway, *Building Peace out of War.*
41 Ibid.
43 Kemper, *Youth in War-to-Peace Transitions,* 43.
44 Drummond Mundal and Cave, *Children as ‘the seeds of peace,* 3.
45 Save the Children Norway, *Thematic Evaluation of Children’s Participation in Armed Conflict.*
47 Drummond Mundal and Cave, *Children as ‘the seeds of peace,* 3.
49 Formal peace talks have been taken place between the Government of Uganda and the Lords Resistance Army rebel forces in Juba, Southern Sudan since September 2006.
50 Save the Children Norway, *Building Peace out of War.*
51 Copies of the Radio Manifesto can be downloaded in French, English or Portuguese from the World Radio Forum website www.worldradioforum.org
52 Nosworthy, *Children’s Security in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding.*
53 Save the Children Norway, *Thematic Evaluation of Children’s Participation in Armed Conflict.*