



Youth in Armed Conflict

- Youth are victims, targets and instruments in armed conflict.
- Often referred as the 'lost generation' of youth who grew up knowing only war.
- Millions of youth worldwide suffer from both physical and psychological damage caused by war – disabled, lost family/friends, destruction of community, disruption of education, loss of shelter and basic services, hazardous security and health conditions.
- Recent years statistics regarding youth and armed conflict:
 - Child Soldiers 250,000.
 - 2 Million youth killed worldwidedied,
 - 6 million youth permanently disabled.
 - Afghanistan - 2.5% are disabled by landmines.
 - Sierra Leone - WHO Survey 2002 – more than 90% youth and children had significant traumatic experiences of different scale an at least 10% need urgent
 - Thousands of girls are being subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence and exploitation (eg. DRC, 60% of girls)..
- Specific countries where youth suffer from conflict: [Afghanistan](#), [Burundi](#), [Central African Republic](#), [Chad](#), [Côte d'Ivoire](#), [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), [Haiti](#), [Iraq](#), Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territory/Israel, [Somalia](#), [Sudan](#) and [Uganda](#), to [Myanmar](#), [Nepal](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [Philippines](#), [Colombia](#), Burma, Liberia, Sierra Leone.

Youth as Victims

(abducted, raped, abused, forced/coerced to fight, etc.)

Legal/Protection instruments:

- [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (1989) and the [Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict](#) (2000) - 120
- [Rome Statute](#) of the International Criminal Court (1998) – Recruitment of youth below 15 in armed forces and violence against women considered war crimes
- International Labour Organization (ILO) [Convention 182](#) concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999) - 160
- [African Charter](#) on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child (1999)
- [Geneva Conventions](#) (1949) and [Additional Protocol I](#) & [Additional Protocol II](#) (1977)
- Security Council resolution [1261 \(1999\)](#), [1314 \(2000\)](#), [1379 \(2001\)](#), [1460 \(2003\)](#), [1539 \(2004\)](#), [1612 \(2005\)](#)
- [Paris Principles](#) (2007)
- [Machel 10 Year Strategic Review](#) (2007) - Part two of A/62/228; follow up to the Landmark "[The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children](#)" A/51/306 (1996)
- Coalition to Stop Use of Child Soldiers – major NGOs
- SRSF for Children in Armed Conflict

Issues:

1. Minimum age to join fighting forces (mandatory/voluntary)
2. Challenges in national implementation in tackling youth rights violations.
3. Proliferation of small arms and light weapons

Inter-relations between Youth and Armed Conflict

There are no conflicts without youth. Youth are fuel for conflict.

**UN High-level panel on Threats, Challenges and Change defines
'youth' as a potential 'threat' to security**

**Youth are not always forced into militant groups – for a reason or
another they CHOOSE to join armed conflict**

Current Paradigm in the UN system:

Lots of youth + frustration (unemployment) = violence

**violence = engagement in armed conflict, crime, gang warfare,
terrorism, theft, drugs, vandalism, self-destructive behaviour**

Non-violent responses to crisis

- 1. Migration to urban areas and overseas countries – safety-valve for conflict – allow this process to happen**
- 2. Sports & artistic activities - contribute to normalcy and peace-building**
- 3. Social movements, religious organizations, CSOs (provide security, a cause, social network, training, opportunities)**

Internal factors to youth crisis

- Youth = age of transition from child to adult - characterized with intense physical, emotional transformation occurring within the individual.
- Development of critical thinking – question contradictions in their environment.
- Development of individual's identity – vision, values and principles
- High sense of Justice – rebel against injustice
- Need a cause / ideals / mission
- Have a strong sense of belonging to group
- Emotionally-driven - energy – enthusiasm - adventure
- Flexible/open - easily influenced (media and elders)

External factors

- ❑ high youth demographics**
- ❑ human rights violations / social injustice**
- ❑ easily available small arms and light weapons**
- ❑ violence/traumas experienced by youth – death, rape, violence – vicious circle.**
- ❑ lack of alternatives – lack of education, employment, recreation, participation opportunities.**

Intervention 1: DDRR

- Rational DDR: Stops youth going back to conflict
- After involvement in conflict, youth are psychologically and socially very derailed – need counselling, re-establish community/family ties, re-engagement with education and employment, going back to ‘normal life’.
- DDR process needs to work with youth but also with communities (sensibilization)
- Gender dimension: Reintegration also must occur of young women which have been stigmatized because they were raped or used as sex slave by opposing party.

Ethical Questions which arise during DDR programmes?

Should the youth who have been involved in conflict be punished for the crimes they have committed or should they be assisted to get re-integrated in society? Are youth rational decision-maker which can take responsibility for their actions? Is it fair that these ex-combatants be singled out and receive so much support? Is it fair that youth get prized for having joined the armed groups?

Not look at youth in armed conflict as a group only to be disarmed, distracted and kept busy – start to take a developmental approach

Intervention 2: Education

Problems

- **Not satisfying school system - Outdated curriculum, lack of teachers, destroyed of infrastructure, long distances/transport, education is not relevant and leading to jobs**
- **Insecure setting - Afghanistan (female teacher & students threatened and killed, and female schools burdened down by fanatic groups).**
- **Discrimination in education – Sri Lanka**
- **Education policies which encourage segregation on the basis of language, ethnic, religious, socio-economic class – parallel/biased education system (Kosovo)**

Renew and increase investment in

- **Primary and secondary education**
- **Experimental education strategies - think outside the box/classroom – use innovative, flexible, non-formal and informal education methodology.**
- **Special fast-track education programmes for youth which have missed out school because of war.**
- **Mixed pluralistic education**
- **Special attention to peace education – promote a culture of tolerance, understanding, prejudice-free, citizenship, human rights**

Intervention 3: Employment

Background Context

- MDGs touch directly on youth employment (Goal 1, target 2)
- In the UN system, youth unemployment seen as a security threat.
- In areas of poverty and no employment opportunities, joining armed groups & criminal gangs becomes a source of income

Renew and increase investment in

- Employment generation programmes - skills development, job placements, micro-enterprise initiatives, links to job market, labour intensive jobs (public works), support Government work policies, work on supply side, youth business skills.
- Focus youth employment programmes around other development efforts such as education, national reconstruction, peace-building, DDR process, etc.

Intervention 4: View youth as resources

- ❖ **Move the paradigm away from that of ‘threat’ and start to look at youth as an ‘asset’**
- ❖ **Power reservoir of agents as positive change**
- ❖ **“MOBILIZE” youth for Development**
 - **Participation in development planning**
 - **Main manpower for development implementation / reconstruction activities (Kosovo UNDP housing project)**
- ❖ **“MOBILIZE” youth for Peace**
 - **Youth more open to peace-building than older generation**
 - **South African youth were at the forefront of the reconciliation**
 - **Inter-ethnic projects in Kosovo, Macedonia, Bosnia – youth took pride to be different from the rest and risk their life for the cause of peace**
 - **Nemat and Elvis story**

“We often worry about the threat that large numbers of unemployed youth pose to peace and security in fragile situations, but how often do we make the effort to train youth as election observers, or as peace monitors in their communities, or as a national network of mediators that can help bring peace to their communities?”

– Ad Merlkert, former UNDP Administrator speech to SC, July 2006.

Intervention 5: Participation

Characteristics

- Youth need to be listened to – feel like their views are respected.
- They tend to rebel against a system that is unjust, repressive and that they are not part of.
- Marginalization of youth in post-conflict

Renew and increase investment in

- Youth Participation in governance, political & civic processes, decision-making, etc.
- Youth councils, NGOs, forums, networks,
- Participation provides opportunity for youth to learn and gain new skills
- Leadership training for young policy-makers, future politicians and administrators of country. (Africa & Kosovo)

Current policy framework around youth in conflict areas

- ✓ **There is a lack of a comprehensive framework and policy in this field.**
- ✓ **Still very much emergency/crisis oriented and less development based.**
- ✓ **Male-oriented strategies.**
- ✓ **Although countries and organizations appreciate the importance of addressing the issue of youth in conflict, there is no significant action taken about it – the rhetoric is not translated into \$\$\$ and political will.**
- ✓ **Efforts to support youth in conflict areas are scattered and ad-hoc, tokenistic and in different areas.**
- ✓ **There is no specific funding for this particular field – youth in conflict programming has to rely on other funding streams.**
- ✓ **Youth programming in post-conflict is a breath of fresh air – when all other interventions are not showing the desired responses, it is often the only hope left for the future of the war-ravaged countries.**
- ✓ **Investment in the sector is not proportionate to the youth demographics and to the risks and consequences of neglecting this group.**
- ✓ **What do you do when you have a child in crisis? You can either neglect him and he will get worst or give provide more attention and support and he will heal.**

Goal 1: Put an end to the use of child soldiers both for combat and sexual purposes during armed conflict.

Target 1: By 2015, all countries should have ratified at least one of the conventions* condemning the use of youth below the age of 18 in hostilities, whether they may be Government forces or rebel groups.

Target 2: Nation-States should monitor and protect the rights of youth in conflict areas, and should endeavour to prosecute the perpetrators of violence against girls and exploitation of child soldiers. When there is not enough national capacity, peacekeeping forces should be authorized to intervene in such war crimes* against youth and perpetrators should be brought before international courts.

Target 3: Governments and the international community should control and reduce the production and distribution of small arms and light weapons, which fuel the engagement of young people in conflict and criminal activities. (Recommendation: a new convention on small arms and light weapons could be developed by 2015)

Goal 2: Prioritize and increase aid support to youth in conflict-prone and post-conflict regions.

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Target 1: By 2015, triple the investment in youth education in conflict zones, primary and secondary, formal and non-formal, insuring that it is relevant, non-discriminatory, and holistic, and paying special attention to peace education.

Target 2: By 2015, triple the investment in youth employment and triple the number of young women and men who are engaged in decent work in conflict-prone and post-conflict regions.

Target 3: Support the demobilization, disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration back into the community life of all male and female youth who were either involved or victimized by the armed conflict.

Goal 3: Increase participation of youth in governance, peace-building and development processes of their communities and country.

Target 1: In all post-conflict regions, establish mechanisms of youth governance, participation and advocacy, such as youth councils, forums, and networks, at local as well as national level.

Target 2: In every post-conflict country, youth involved in national reconstruction, development and peace initiatives should be at least three times the number of youth previously engaged in conflict.

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Neissan, 5/19/2008