Reintegration of Youth into Society in the Aftermath of War

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Introduction

In recent decades, youths have featured centrally as both the targets and the perpetrators of violence in various conflicts around the globe. Young people's participation in warfare and political conflict is not a new phenomenon. However, the scale and magnitude of the problem today is unprecedented, both in the numbers of young people involved and in the degree of their participation. It is estimated that in Africa, in 2004, about 100,000 children under the age of 18 were involved in armed conflicts as combatants in places such as Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Sudan, and Uganda.[1] In past conflicts in Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe, young people also featured as combatants. Youths can become involved in armed conflict in many different ways from participation in direct combat to spies, carriers of ammunition, guards, as well as cooks, cleaners and servants in military camps. Girls may undergo sexual abuse, rape, enslavement, and other tribulations during war.

This paper examines the reintegration of young people affected by armed conflict into society in the aftermath of war. It addresses particularly the situation of young ex-combatants. The reintegration of youths in post-conflict societies is a complex and multi-faceted process that includes economic, political and social insertion into their communities. What resources are available to facilitate their transition into "normal" life? What are the strengths and limitations of the programs put in place to support them? What are their thoughts about the experiences they went through? How do they assess their present situations? What do they find most troubling or frustrating as they struggle to construct new lives as young adults in peacetime? How do they envisage their future? These are some of the questions this paper will try to address.

The paper is divided into four sections: (1) it examines the challenges faced by this group during demobilization and family reunification, by looking at the programs put in place to support them and facilitate their return to their families and communities. (2) It also explores the challenges of social reintegration into everyday life in the communities. Issues such as stigmatization, war trauma, sense of belonging and or exclusion, forgiveness and social and emotional rehabilitation are discussed in this section. The paper also considers community interventions such as healing and purification rituals. (3) This section focuses on economic challenges faced by youths in general and young combatants in particular. The lack of education and vocational training, lack of employment and access to livelihoods make them extremely vulnerable to potential re-recruitment and to psychosocial and emotional disorders. (4) The paper ends with an analysis of the current political environment for as an enabling factor for reducing the

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[1] Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers – Global Report 2004

plight of these youths and offers some recommendations to governments, donor agencies, and civil society organizations supporting young former combatants. Throughout the paper, the voices and viewpoints of young men and women who serve as combatants with military groups, and endured sexual abuse and labor exploitation are brought in and vividly express their feelings, experiences, joys and frustrations in this complex journey to build their own futures. There is also an examination of the intervention programs developed by national and international agencies to address the difficulties faced by young people in post-conflict situations.

1. Challenges of Demobilization and Family Reunification

> *I joined the SPLA when I was 13. I am from Bahr Al Ghazal. They demobilized me in 2001 and took me to Rumbek, but I was given no demobilization documents. Now, I am stuck here because my family was killed in a government attack and because the SPLA would not re-recruit me. At times I wonder why I am not going back to SPLA, half of my friends have and they seem to be better off than me.*[2]

Demobilization Programs
Demobilization programs intended to assist former soldiers in the transition "home" are more immediately designed to contain, disarm, and demobilize rebel forces. These demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) programs are aimed at assisting former soldiers to acquire new skills and return to their communities. However, many DDR programs lack adequate resources, and are not designed to fit the particular conditions of young combatants. They often make no provisions or plans for the special reintegration needs of children and youths. They often exclude soldiers under eighteen, the legal age for military recruitment, and focus exclusively on males, leaving out girls and young women who had been held captive in the service of military forces.

Young combatants under eighteen, even after fighting in a conflict for many years, are not considered soldiers under international law.[3] Underage combatants who are taken to containment centres or seek out the facilities established under demobilization schemes are often not given the same package of benefits—a sum of money, foodstuffs, and working materials—as "regular" soldiers and are instead referred to non-governmental humanitarian organizations, such as the International Committee for the Red Cross and the Save the Children Alliance and the like. The NGOs established specific programs to support them and other war-affected children. This can lead to disappointment and frustration as children and youth do not receive the same rewards as their adult counterparts, as this extract from a Mozambican underage ex-soldier shows:

They promised us many things … they said that when the war was over they would give us money because we were good fighters … now they are taking everything for themselves and leaving us out … we were better fighters than many of them.[4]

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[2] Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. *Young ex combatant interviewed by Coalition staff, southern Sudan, February 2004.*

[3] See Geneva Convention of 1949 and Optional Protocol 2001

[4] Zita an ex-Renamo young combatant from Macia, Maputo (Mozambique) interviewed by the author in Macia in September 1995.

In Angola, the reintegration of the underage group was carried out by Christian Children's Fund (CCF) which established the Reintegration of Underage Soldiers Programme (RUS) in 1996. The RUS programme focused on the provision of care and support for young combatants coming out of the cantonment areas and in need of being reintegrated back into their communities of origin. To provide for the children's immediate needs, a demobilization package comprising a sum of money in Angolan *Kwanzas* and a kit with clothing and basic foodstuffs was given to every demobilized young soldier at the time of the reunification. This program was relatively successful in its implementation as it was undertaken by an all Angolan CCF staff in collaboration with local activists in the communities (mostly from religious groups and associations). However, due to the break down of the cease-fire agreement in 1998, some youths were re-recruited into military activity.

I was in Huila when the Blue Berets (UN peacekeepers) took us to our cantonment area in Vila Nova. In the cantonment areas we often gave fake names and sometimes lied about our areas of origin because we were afraid of being re-recruited. I received three bags of maize, a pair of trousers, a shirt, a pair of shoes, and 39 million Kwanzas. From the cantonment area I was taken to the church of S. Pedro, and it was a catechist (church member) who reunited me with my family.[5]

In the DRC, the government initiated in 1997 various programs to demobilize 75,000 soldiers, including many young soldiers. These were carried out in collaboration with UNICEF and a number of international NGOs. These demobilization and reintegration programs supported young ex-combatants in Goma (North Kivu), Bukavu (South Kivu) and Kisangani (Province Orientale). The programs consisted of three phases: (1) psychological counseling and participation in community building activities. At this stage, family visits were encouraged and children with special needs were identified; (2) they were reintegrated into their families or put with other care givers and were given literacy and vocational training; (3) This stage comprised close monitoring of the reintegration process, the continuation of counseling, and additional capacity-building training was provided.[6]

The use of child soldiers has been an issue in Sudan since the beginning of the civil war in 1983. As a result of war, many children have been separated from their families and most of these became child soldiers. In 1998, a demobilization programme was proposed for young soldiers, and was jointly implemented by UNICEF, Save the Children, Radda Barnen, and others. The project targeted all child soldiers under the age of 18. The project advocated the establishment of a Child Rights Officer in each military group who would be trained in how to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and how to demobilize them. The objectives of the project were to identify and trace all children in the SPLA and SSIA, reunify as many as possible with their families, provide necessary

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[5] Astro,a young men from Karilongue, Huambo (Angola). He was seventeen years old when interviewed by the CCF team in 1998.

[6] UNICEF, 1997. Report on Pilot Project for the Social Reintegration and Demobilisation of Child Soldiers in Eastern DRC

psychosocial counseling, provide needed education and training, and to provide family and community support for the return of demobilized child soldiers. The main strategy of the project was to work through existing and traditional structures such as clan networks and churches. Also, the capacity of the Child Rights Officers was developed as much as possible so that demobilization was being conducted by the Sudanese themselves as much as possible.[7]

Some demobilization programs are quite successful, especially those which are conducted in an environment of cease-fire and with direct involvement of governments and other fighting forces to guarantee protection and sustainability. This was the case in the Sudan. The Sudanese and Angolan cases also illustrate the importance of grounding the program within local culture and understandings of childhood and youth through the engagement of traditional structures like clan networks and church groups. In the case of Mozambique, the fact that the program took place after the cease-fire and in acclimate of relative peace, assured its successful implementation. The same cannot be said of the Angolan and the DRC demobilization programs which saw many young people being re-enlisted into military activity due to the continuation of hostilities between belligerents. According to an evaluation by UNICEF[8], the DRC programs were not ultimately successful because many young ex-combatants who had participated in the programs were re-recruited by armed forces. This happened because the programs took place in areas where violent conflict still persisted and military groups had not given guarantees for the protection of demobilized youth combatants. This was an important learning lesson to be learned. It showed that demobilization in a state of crisis is likely to fail unless there is a joint effort by governments and rebel groups to protect and support the youth.

Reunification with Family and Communities
After demobilization, the young former combatants need to be reunified with their relatives. Tracing and reunification programs were established in many countries alongside demobilization. In Mozambique, in general, family reunifications were successfully accomplished, despite being an expensive process which in some cases required elaborate media programs and transportation to local communities by planes and helicopters.

The Tracing and Reunification Program in Mozambique was conducted by the Children and War Program. This programme was established in 1988 and carried out in seven of Mozambique's ten provinces. The programme directly facilitated the reunification of more than 12,000 unaccompanied children and youths with their relatives and helped make family reunifications possible for thousands of others between 1988 and 1995.

While in general family reunifications or placement in foster parenting can be accomplished with some success, the big challenge is providing effective follow-up support and assistance to former war-affected children and youths once back in the villages. Most children and

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[7] Alor Kuol, M. (1997). Operation Lifeline Sudan-Southern; Young, H. (1997). Operation Lifeline Sudan-Southern Sector, Briefing note on child soldiers.
[8] UNICEF, 1997. Report on Pilot Project for the Social Reintegration and Demobilisation of Child Soldiers in Eastern DRC.

youths are reintegrated into communities severely devastated by war, with populations struggling to rebuild their lives and regain their dignity. Many may have had their parents or close relatives killed during the war; many may have had their homes burnt; schools and hospitals have been destroyed; friends and neighbors have disappeared. In these circumstances, reunification with family relatives and fellow villagers does not represent the end of these children's predicament. The real issues regarding reintegration arise after young people are back in the communities. They need to return to school, obtain vocational training, and get access to healthcare; sometimes they need regular food, clothing and shelter. The standard reintegration kits provided by NGOs may not last more than a week, as the youth most likely share it with relatives and friends who welcome them back. NGOs supporting reunified youngsters often face the dilemma of having to extend support to the entire community in need, which often stretches their limited resources, and make certain programs unsustainable in the long run.

An example of this comes from the family reunification program in Mozambique. After successfully relocating young people into war-ravaged communities, the program had to deal with the fact that many community schools had been burned during the war, teachers had been killed or displaced, and school education was no longer available. The Children and War Program created very basic community schools under trees and employed untrained teachers in an effort to keep the children busy. At the end of the program the Ministry of Education of Mozambique was called to absorb these community schools into the national educational system. The government refused to do so, on the grounds that these schools did not fulfill the minimum standards to be fully incorporated in the official educational system: most of them operated under a tree; the teachers had no formal qualifications and could not be placed and paid within the national qualification and salary scale. This created some tensions between the NGO and the ministry. Ministry officials thought that the development of such schools should have been discussed and planned with the ministry from the start to guarantee their sustainability within the national system at the end of the program. This situation is but one example of the challenges that can arise in the course of providing assistance to war-affected children and youth.

2. The Challenges for Social and Political Reintegration

> *I feel so bad about the things that I did. It disturbs me so much that I inflicted death on other people. When I go home I must do some traditional rites because I have killed. I must perform these rites and cleanse myself. I still dream about the boy from my village that I killed. I see him in my dreams, and he is talking to me, saying I killed him for nothing, and I am crying.* [9]

The "transitional" aid programs to support young soldiers often assume that demobilized soldiers can reenter intact families and communities, but many have lost kin, and their villages and neighborhoods are unable to absorb them. The capacity of kin-groups and communities to make productive places for returning soldiers has been deeply compromised by the general conditions of protracted warfare. Equally seriously, many

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[9] A 16-year-old girl after demobilization from an armed group. Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers (Source: U.S. State Dept. TIP Report 2005)

young men who have been recruited at a tender age and spent years in the military forces have entirely missed the initiation, schooling, and job training that ordinarily takes place during those years. Many demobilized young men have no route into adult status, but are nonetheless required to be independent

Many young ex-combatants express mixed feelings—joys, fears, and uncertainties—about returning to their communities of origin and starting new lives from scratch. Many justifiably fear being re-recruited into the military forces. Demobilized members of rebel militia are particularly reluctant to return to the areas where their groups remain strong. Others fear rejection by their communities because of the role they have played during the war. It is known that many young former combatants were forced to kill their own relatives and raid their villages. The caption above of the 16 year old girl who is afflicted by the killing of a boy from his village is a common occurrence. Those who have —willingly or unwillingly—fought with rebel groups but came from areas that support the government are especially apprehensive. Former young soldiers are often joyful at leaving behind the violence and terror they had endured and return to their parents, relatives, and friends. Yet they worry about whether their relatives will be found alive and whether their villages or homes have been bombed or burned. The statements below of former soldiers from Angola are eloquent testimony to the ways in which these concerns are intertwined.

In the village some people despise the ex-soldiers who belonged to UNITA; they say that they will denounce us to the government.... I live in fear.... I fear the war might start again.... When I think of all that, I think it is better if I die because I have suffered a lot. Many in my family died in the war and some disappeared.[10]

He felt guilty at having survived when so many of his relatives did not, and he feared that others held him responsible for their own losses. The punishment they might inflict on him seems to echo his own sense that he might as well die, since he had suffered so many losses. His wartime experiences had cut him adrift from the moral and emotional moorings that give meaning to existence.

Joao worried most about other people's reactions to him:

Some people in my village look down at me because I was part of the UNITA army. That makes me very sad and sometimes I don't sleep well.... The people in the village don't respect the ex-soldiers from UNITA.[11]

Joao's uncertainly about whether he was deserving of respect made him sad and uneasy. Mario, who was nineteen years old and came from the same province as both Soma and Joao, was not only concerned about others' hostility but also anxious about his own safety:

Some people don't like to see me at all because I was a UNITA soldier. They hate me because they say UNITA came here and killed the people and robbed their possessions.... That makes me fear that something might happen to me.[12]

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[10] Soma a nineteen-year-old from Huambo, interviewed by the CCF team in 1998.
[11] Joao, a twenty-year-old from Huambo, interviewed by the CCF team in 1998

For former soldiers like these, reintegration into their communities is problematic. Another example is that of Miguel, a sixteen-year-old from Uige, who was consumed by his own feelings of anger and remorse:

I don't have much appetite. When I am sitting by myself I think a lot about the war and sometimes I feel like taking a knife and hurting or killing somebody to see blood ... now the only thing that helps me to forget is to drink.[13]

Miguel's statement expresses an obsession with the sight of blood and the experience of hurting. Although during the war he had inflicted those injuries on others, after the peace he seemed to fear his own aggressive impulses and to be more likely to hurt himself than others. No wonder he turned into alcohol to forget about his war memories.

In addition to the difficulties that are common to men and women, young women's sexual reputations and marital prospects can be seriously compromised by their captivity and, in some cases, maternity. Women's experience of sexual violation can be more difficult for them to overcome, in part because it is often an "open secret"—recognized by everyone but seldom discussed or dealt with. Female survivors of captivity in military camps bear traces of their war experience as indelible, although not always as visible, as the victims of landmines. The shame that these women endure and the stigma that brands them blight their futures, dimming their prospects for marriage as well as social reintegration.

The mother of a girl kidnapped and raped by rebel forces in Mozambique lamented:

Because there aren't many men in the island, girls give themselves to men very easily. Most of these men do not have serious intentions. They just want to sleep with them, but do not want to marry them. They say they are "second hand" because they were RENAMO soldier's "wives." They just use and abuse them. [14]

In this mother's view, the instrumental, short-term viewpoint that soldiers adopted in the military camps has taken over in the rest of society after the peace. The sexual abuse that girls suffered has diminished their potential value as brides and impaired bargaining power in negotiations between the sexes. A twenty-year-old voiced similar sentiments:

Men only want to take advantage of girls like me—who were forced to be "wives" of soldiers during the war. Therefore, for us it is very difficult to marry…. My childhood was destroyed by the war, and now my adult life is suffering the consequences of the war.[15]

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[12] Mario a nineteen-year-old from Huambo interviewed by the CCF team in 1998

[13] Miguel from Uige in an nterview with the CCF team in 1998

[14] Mrs Cuamba interviewed by Alcinda Honwana in Josina Machel Island in Mozambique in May 1999.

[15] Elsa, a twenty-year-old woman from Josina Machel Island in Mozambique. Interview consucted by Alcinda Honwana in May 1999.

Those who have children conceived in the military camps are in the most difficult position. These young unmarried mothers have no means to maintain themselves and their children. Many live with their own mothers and contribute to the support of numerous siblings. Some try desperately to find a man who will marry them and take care of them and their children.

Many young men and women who have been involved in conflicts as combatants also face difficulties in their transition from military to civilian life. Some show tremendous difficulty in controlling their aggressive and anger impulses and sometimes long for the high adrenaline life their experienced in war times. The quote above from a young man from Angola who still longed for war and bloodshed constitutes a good example. Although this might represent a smaller proportion of ex-combatants it is nonetheless worth noting and paying attention to. Specialized psychosocial programs need to be put in place to address these extreme cases.

Inter-generational tensions and challenges to the authority of the elders are evident especially in those youth who may have held positions of considerable responsibility within militia groups. Many have serious difficulties coping with routine family life in the villages and adjusting traditional systems of authority. I recall many adults in Mozambique and in Angola mentioning that beyond the massive killings and material destruction, the wars left a deep moral crisis in their communities. Youth, they said, were not only robbed of their childhoods but also denied the possibility of becoming morally grounded citizens. It was common to hear adults say things like: "*Children these days do not listen to the elders*";[16] or "*there is no notion of good and bad among young people*;"[17] or even "*with the war, initiation ceased to be performed and this is what we see...*"[18] The absence of initiation practices is believed to have created a lapse in the process of maturing into an adult person, not just for those who left to fight but for youth in general. In addition to the family, institutions such as the school, the church, and youth associations were also seriously disrupted by war and ceased to play a role in the initiation of the young into adulthood. Young people have to make their own transition into adulthood within an environment of war and societal chaos.

In the aftermath of war, young people who spent many years in military life need to be re-socialized and learn to live and interact with others. Many feel the need to be reaccepted back into their families and communities and pardoned for the horrible deeds committed during the war. Community based strategies for healing and rehabilitating former young combatants have been helpful. The discussion below highlights some local notions of war pollution and cleansing used by local communities in post-war reintegration.

War Pollution and Cleansing Rituals

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[16] *Seculo* Kapata, interviewed by the CCF team in Kuito, 1997. The honorific *seculo* means elderly person in Umbundu.
[17] *Seculo* Afonso interviewed by Alcinda Honwana in Kuito, Angola in February 1998.
[18] Antonio Sonama, Uige, interviewed by the CCF team.

In many African societies war is conceptualized in opposition to society as a space without norms, or where social norms are routinely violated. Individuals who have been in a war, who killed or saw people being killed, are seen as polluted by the 'wrong-doings of the war'[19]. The spirits of the dead believed to have been killed unjustly, and who did not have a proper burial - with all the rituals aimed at placing them in their proper positions in the world of the ancestors – are believed to be unsettled spirits or spirits of bitterness and to afflict those who killed them. The unsettled spirit's revenge can also be extended to the killer's relatives, or even be nasty to passers-by who cross their path.

Because burial rituals are often not performed during war time, pollution by the spirits of the dead of the war is likely to affect the living. Soldiers and civilians involved in the war are vulnerable to these afflictions. Particularly vulnerable are the young men and woman who went to war without being appropriately prepared to face the consequences of their actions. They are seen as the vehicles through which the spirits of the dead of the war might enter and afflict the community. Therefore, the cleansing process is seen as a fundamental condition for collective protection against pollution and for the peaceful social reintegration of war-affected populations into society, especially the young.[20] These rituals are seen as vital to calm the spirits and place them in their proper positions in the spiritual world, and to heal or prevent the illness of those who have been exposed to war. The rituals are also moments of family and community reconciliation and forgiveness from the wrong doings of the past.

Postwar community healing for former young combatants consists fundamentally of purification or cleansing rituals which involve an acknowledgment of the atrocities committed and subsequent break from that past, which is articulated through ritual performance. Family members and the broader community attend these rituals. It is during these rituals that the child is purged and purified of the 'contamination' of war and death, as well as of sin, guilt, and from the retaliation of avenging spirits of those killed by him. These rituals involve the whole social group and are replete with symbolism. The rituals also addressed to those who did not kill but witness war and bloodshed.[21] The two case studies below illustrate rituals performed for former young combatants.

The first case is that of Samuel, young men from Mozambique who serve alongside Renamo forces.

When he got back home, a traditional healer took Samuel to the bush, and there a small hut covered with dry grass was built. The boy, dressed with the dirty clothes he brought from the military camp, entered the hut and undressed himself. Then fire was set to the hut, and an adult relative helped out the boy. The hut, the clothes and everything else that the boy brought from the camp had to be burned. A chicken was sacrificed for the spirits of the dead

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[19] On social pollution, see Harriet Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine* (London: Academic Press, 1977).
[20] See Honwana, 1997, 1999.
[21] See also Green & Honwana, 1999.

and the blood spread around the ritual place. After that Samuel had to inhale the smoke of some herbal remedies, and bath himself with water treated with medicine.[22]

This healing ritual brings together a series of symbolic meanings aimed at cutting the young man's link with the past (the war). While modern psychotherapeutic practices emphasize verbal exteriorization of the affliction, here through symbolic meanings the past is locked away. This is seen in the burning of the hut and the clothes and the cleansing of the body. To talk and recall the past is not necessarily seen as a prelude to healing or diminishing pain. Indeed, it is often believed to open the space for the malevolent forces to intervene. This is also apparent in the following case from Uige (Angola).

When the child or young man returns home, he is made to wait on the outskirts of the village. The oldest woman from the village throws maize flour at the boy and anoints his entire body with a chicken. He is only able to enter the village after this ritual is complete. After the ritual, he is allowed to greet his family in the village. Once the greeting is over, he must kill a chicken, which is subsequently cooked and served to the family. For the first eight days after the homecoming, he is not allowed to sleep in his own bed, only on a rush mat on the floor. During this time, he is taken to the river and water is poured on his head and he is given manioc to eat. As he leaves the site of the ritual, he must not look behind him. (Angola, notes from research undertaken with Christian Children's Fund).

This case emphasizes the non-interaction with family and friends before ritual cleansing. The child is kept out of the village until the ritual is performed, and cannot greet people and sleep in his bed until the ritual proceedings are over. As mentioned also above, although children and young people may be asked about war experiences as part of treatment, yet this is not a fundamental condition for healing. The ceremony aims at symbolically cleansing the polluted individual and to put the war experience behind him, to "forget" (note the symbolism of being forbidden to look back, in the example from Uige). Food taboos and other kinds of ritual restrictions are applied.

In these rituals is reflected the belief in the 'pollution' that the young people bring home to their homes and villages - they have to be cleansed as soon as possible to be able to socialize freely with relatives and friends. Healing is achieved through non-verbal symbolic procedures, understood by participants. Recounting and remembering the traumatic war events is believed to open the door for the harmful spirits to penetrate the communities. Viewed from this perspective the well-meaning attempts of western psychotherapists to help local people deal with war trauma may, in fact, cause more harm than help.

This shows that there are many ways of understanding and dealing with war trauma. Cultural beliefs and practices are important in determining people's perceptions and understandings of it. As Swartz (1998) points out, "*we all make meaning of our lives in the light of our own experiences and those of the people around us*" (260). As we have seen in these examples, modern psychotherapeutic interventions are but among many

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[22] Samuel, from Mozambique interviewed by Alcinda Honwana in Mozambique in 1993

ways of understanding and dealing with traumas caused by war. These examples highlight the tensions between local and universal understandings of healing war trauma and reconciliation in the aftermath of war. These important traditional approaches often may collide with, or not find an expression in internationally backed Truth and Reconciliation Commissions such as the on-going process in Liberia and the previous ones in Sierra Leone and South Africa[23].

Community based cleansing and healing rituals seem to be effective in dealing with the emotional and social problems of war-affected children, helping them to come to terms with their war experiences and facilitating their reintegration into family and community life. However, such practices on their own cannot sustain long-lasting results, especially for young former soldiers who do not have yet a clear direction in their lives. While these rituals may bring psychological and emotional relief, the fact that many youth do not have jobs, are not going to school, and have few marketable skills makes them vulnerable to a myriad of problems.

Political reintegration is even a greater challenge to the youth. Those who did not participate in the conflict as combatants often find spaces for political activism through community groups or student and youth associations. For ex-combatants political participation is more challenging as they are still grappling with basic education, vocational training to secure livelihoods and employment. Many are marginalized and feel excluded from local or national political processes. There is need for political education of youths. They need to be exposed to training about peace-building and conflict management, about participation in democratic processes (how to vote, why vote, etc). It is also important that government and civil society organizations involve youth groups in local and national decision making processes and engage in constructive political dialogue with them. Young people often know very well what they want, and are able to express themselves orally or through theatre, music and art. The often rebellious and challenging nature of youth leads them to contest the status quo. Thus, the need to carefully manage inter-generational tensions and relationships through education and inclusion in society processes. Young people constitute a powerful force for change and for the emergence of new ideas, but need to be constructively engaged in on going social and political developments.

Given the difficulties in social and political integration, most young former combatants are forced to find solutions for their problems themselves. While some find ways within their already impoverished communities, many migrate to urban areas or abroad in search of more secure livelihoods and employment.

3. The Challenges for Economic Reintegration

> *I lost my time in the military and now I don't manage to study to learn a profession....*
> *Working the land without fertilizers won't produce anything ... When I think of all this, my*
> *heart beats and becomes sore and I am unable to sleep at night.... For the future ... I want to*
> *be a good farmer, because I already lost hope of being able to study, and because I don't*

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[23] See Introduction to "Roads to Reconciliation" 2005, by Skaar, E; Gloopen, S. & Suhrke, A. (eds).

want to lose hope completely in my life, I would rather live, work the land, help my mother and try to get a wife.[24]

Demobilized young soldiers express considerable anxiety about what they will do after the war. Most have little or no training, few skills, and no formal education. The transition from military to civilian life represents   is a new stage in their lives, full of joy from breaking with the past but also full of fears and uncertainties about the present and the future.

Many former young combatants cannot not attend school because they have to support themselves, while those who do go to school have to attend classes alongside children half their age. In these circumstances, community healing needs to be complemented by vocational training and job creation schemes. A general alleviation of poverty is urgently necessary in order to give these young people some prospect of a better future. If these youths are not given a chance to improve their lives, they will easily be absorbed back into violence, whether urban gangs, illicit business dealings, or rebel militias in new civil wars.

In both Mozambique and Angola, many young soldiers were initiated into the military when they had not yet entered their teens, but when they returned home after the war they were seventeen or eighteen, and some were in their early twenties. For many families, boy children went away but young men came back. These were not young men like their fathers and grandfathers had been; they had missed the initiation and training into adult male roles that their communities normally offer and, instead, had transgressed the boundaries of acceptable adult male behavior. Reintegrating these returned soldiers was a formidable challenge.

Former young soldiers were acutely conscious of the truncated futures they faced as a result of their military involvement. Mario, quoted in the beginning of this section, worried about what he had missed while fighting the war. Nineteen and fatherless, he was directing his aspirations toward family life and coming to terms with a possible future in farming. Eighteen-year-old Fonseca was making a new life in Kuito, his home town, after fighting with the government army. Fonseca was enrolled in a skill training center in Kuito. He wanted to get a truck driver's license and become a mechanic. But he reported that his plans were in some disorder.

I am in big trouble. Three of my girlfriends are expecting my babies. Each of their families wants me to marry them, but I have no means to marry anybody... I want to study, but that happened, so I don't know what to do. If I could I would have fifteen children, but I wouldn't want any of them to be a soldier.[25]

The path to maturity that Fonseca might have followed in peacetime had been utterly disrupted. His time with the military forces had postponed his education, and he incurred parental responsibilities before being prepared to fulfill them. Joao, a twenty-year-old demobilized Angolan soldier, also longed for what he had lost because of the war.

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[24] Mario a nineteen-year-old from from Huambo, Angola. Interview conducted by the CCF team in January 1998.

[25] Fonseca, eighteen-year-old from Kuito, Angola interviewed by the CCF team in 1998.

If I could I would have told those who gave orders to start the war to talk among themselves and stop the war. Because of the war I cannot be a truck driver. I needed to have studied, but I lost my time in the war.[26]

In Mozambique, the fate of girls and young women who were kidnapped and held captive in military camps depended on the ability of their families to absorb them. Like demobilized young men, they faced daunting problems. Many had lost their parents and other relatives during the war. Their homes and villages had been destroyed. Their educations had been truncated, and few opportunities for training were available. Chronic poverty and unemployment had only been exacerbated by protracted civil conflict.

Watching these young women go about their daily routines six years after the ceasefire and four years after the first general elections in Mozambique, an ordinary observer would never imagine that their lives are filled with such devastating and dramatic experiences of terror and survival. In spite of all they have suffered, these young women are tremendously resilient. Postwar conditions remain difficult: they live in dire poverty, without jobs or proper education. These young people's resilience calls into question orthodox views of child development, which assume that children and youth are especially vulnerable under circumstances of adversity. Young people in Africa have proved to be especially able to accommodate dissonance, adversity, and change, and more capable of personal resilience than many adults.[27]

As these young women themselves assured me, if they managed to survive the war they can certainly find ways of coping with the present. The project of the local NGO *Reconstruindo a Esperança* keeps many of them busy in productive activities for part of the day. They receive a token sum from the NGO to help with daily subsistence. Through the NGO, too, they buy some products, especially locally produced goods, inexpensively. Many young women work on their family's land. To earn cash they buy and resell goods, such as snacks, juice drinks, and cigarettes. Some travel to a nearby town and buy these goods to bring back to the island. Others receive goods from boyfriends in South Africa and resell them. Few of them can fully rely on family support. Indeed, if they live with their mothers and other siblings, they often make the main contribution to the family income.

To make ends meet, these young women organize rotating savings and loan schemes among themselves called *xitique*[28]. Each member receives this sum every ten months. This system enables young women to accumulate money for more substantial expenditures. Those who have boyfriends in South Africa may also receive clothing and shoes from them. Young women on Josina Machel like modern clothing, which they

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[26] Joao, twenty-year-old from Huambo Angola in an interivew with the CCF team in 1998

[27] J. Boyden, presentation at the SSRC workshop on youth in Africa, Cape Town 1999.

[28] About ten girls get together in a *xitique* group. At the end of each month, each participant puts in the same small amount of money. The total is then given to one of them, in a set order of turn-taking. So, if ten members each contribute 1,000 *Meticais*, the combined total will be 10,000 *Meticais (1,000 Mtical = +- $4US)*

wear to church on Sunday or when they travel to Xinavane, Xai-Xai, or Maputo. During the week they dress in local *capulanas*, pieces of fabric they tie around the waist. Modern goods get to the island through Maputo and other small towns nearby, as well as through Nelspruit and Johannesburg in South Africa (the towns closest to the Mozambican border).

Some young women in Josina Machel have decided not to stay at home and wait for remittances from their boyfriends; they are also migrating illegally to South Africa in search of a better life. Some of these women, like some men, are caught and deported. Those who manage to stay in South Africa often end up in very poorly paid jobs, or even prostitution. South African media report that prostitution rings use young migrants from Mozambique and other countries in the region. These reports suggest that girls recruited in Mozambique are promised proper jobs in South Africa and then coerced into prostitution once they are far from home. Those who remain on the island hope that one day they too will travel to South Africa or Maputo and be able to afford all the goods of the modern world. Through television and films, as well as through news from migrants, they are aware of the bounty and autonomy the wider world promises.

This raises the important issue of young people's migration due to war, economic hardship and lack of social opportunities for personal development (education, training, employment). This includes both rural to urban migration and migration from the war-affected country to a neighboring country or even a different continent. The majority of the continent – even in non-conflict zones - faces the challenge of youth migration struggle to find adequate means to integrate them in society. Apart from the internal rural exodus or flows of refugees and displaced youngsters to neighboring countries in times of war, international trans-continental migration is becoming a serious issue. For example, there have been several reports of thousands of young men, especially from West African countries, fleeing across the Mediterranean Sea to look for better life prospects in Europe. Many are caught and deported to then attempt the same journey months later.

Education and Vocational Training
Because many ex-combatants have spent their school-age years as child soldiers, they may be more interested in earning an income once they are no longer soldiers. However, for those still of school age, standard education programs may still be an option. In some cases, young soldiers have no families or community to return to, so they opt to stay in the military. In such cases, the military can provide basic literacy training and basic vocational training. In general, young combatants receive little training or education while in military service, so they lack this when they demobilize and attempt to return to society. Without education or some kind of vocational training they are likely to remain unemployable.[29]

The right to education in a situation of conflict raises practical issues regarding responsibility. Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of the child to education and obligates the State to ensure that right is achieved with

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[29] UNICEF, 1998. War Affected Youth Support Project Progress Report.

equal opportunity for all. However in times of conflict the State may not have control over all its territories. In such cases, compliance can be excused if the State can show it has made its best effort. It is less clear whether the non government entities in control of a territory are obligated to assume the responsibility of the State, indeed, they do not often have the infrastructure and resources needed to fulfill such a responsibility.

In addition to standard school programs, some organizations provide ex-combatants and the entire communities with programs on peace education, land mine awareness, trauma and disability education, and HIV/AIDS awareness. While these are all extremely good ideas, in order for them to be sustained and filter down they need to be embedded in local world views and systems of meaning. The great challenge for governments, UN agencies, international and national NGOs developing these programs is blending them into local cultural understandings and normative value systems. Otherwise, these programs will hardly be sustainable in these communities.

During these wars, many young people became vulnerable to recruitment because of a lack of economic, political, and social opportunities in the countryside. Some youths volunteered to join either the military because the possession of a gun is often the only way they can access food, shelter and experience a sense of power. The failures in social and economic development programs, and the disruptions caused by globalization, war and disease, amongst other factors, promoted an environment of instability and global conflict that exacerbated generational disconnections making the lives of many young Africans vulnerable to violence and war.[30] In the aftermath of the war, many of these demobilised and "reintegrated" youths continue to be as vulnerable as they were before joining military activities: they have no skills, no jobs, and no education. The socio-economic situation in the rural areas, where most of them came from, has not improved, and on the contrary, it may even have worsened making it even less attractive to young people. The massive destruction of social and economic infrastructure due to war - housing, health clinics, schools - the extreme poverty and difficult environmental conditions continue to prevail.

Young people exposed to war return to villages and communities physically devastated by the conflict and with profound social wounds. These are the dilemmas that face youth post-war that need t be seriously addressed by weaving the threads of experiences of suffering, violation, marginalization and exclusion.Beyond healing in the immediate aftermath of war, lasting results will only be achieved if the world is committed to address the structural causes of this problem, by looking seriously at issues such as: poverty reduction, economic development, political participation and social stability.

4. Enabling Policy Environment

The Legal Framework for Protection and Prevention

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[30] Singer, P. W. 2005. Children at War. New York: Pantheon Books; Collier, P. 2000. Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy. Washington: The World Bank; Maxted, J. 2003. "Children and Armed Conflict in Africa". Social Identities 9. no.1 (March); El Kenz, A. 1996. "Youth and Violence", in Stephen Ellis, Africa's New People, Policies and Institutions. The Hague:DGIS

The magnitude of youth's involvement in war today led the international community to establish a legal and normative framework of protection. The 1977 First Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions already provided that states shall take "*all feasible measures in order that children who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities and ... they shall refrain from recruiting them into their armed forces.*"[31] The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 38(2), and the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, article 22(2), both reinforce the provisions of the First Protocol by emphasizing that states must *ensure* the protection of children under fifteen years from taking direct part in hostilities. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts, adopted 2000, raises the minimum age for military recruitment to eighteen years of age[32].

Other significant international instruments for protection of children include the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in 1998, and the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, adopted in 1999. The Rome Statute makes it a clear crime to recruit—conscript or enlist—children under fifteen years of age, or to use them in hostilities in both international and intrastate armed conflicts, whether on behalf of a government or any non-state armed group.[33] The ILO convention lists "*forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict*"[34] among the worst forms of child labor. These treaties were rapidly ratified by the international community. The Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention was the most rapidly ratified labor convention in history, with 147 states parties by November 2003. In April 2002, the Rome Statute reached the threshold of sixty ratifications needed to bring it into force.

The UN Security Council has passed a number of resolutions aimed at protecting children and young people from armed conflicts. Security Council Resolution 1261 of 1999 stressed the responsibility of all states to bring an end to impunity and their obligation to prosecute those responsible for grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. In its Resolution 1379 of 2001, the Security Council urged member states *"to prosecute those responsible for ... egregious crimes perpetrated against children."* In 2003, Security Council Resolution 1460 endorsed the UN Era of Application Campaign, led by the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and involving various UN agencies, to ensure more systematic monitoring and reporting on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, and other types of abuses and violations committed against children in situations of war. While many agencies, organizations, and activist groups have, over the years, been able to gather significant information about the situation of young people in armed conflict areas and

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[31] Additional Protocol I, art. 77(2).
[32] Optional Protocol on the Convention of the Rights of the Child concerning involvement of children in armed conflicts, available at http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng.nsf/iwp
[33] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, UN Doc. A/CONF/183/9*, available at http://www.un.org/law/icc/statute/romefra.htm.
[34] ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (1999), convention no. 182, art. 3(a).

provided assistance to mitigate their plight, a lot of work still needs to be done to enforce international laws and ensuring that violators cannot act with impunity.

Despite the growing awareness for providing effective reintegration for children and youths in the aftermath of war, governments, international community and donor agencies are still grappling with how to make these programs more adequate to the needs of the youth and more sustainable in the long run. The Stockholm Initiative for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (SIDDR) is an important process aimed at addressing this complex issue in a new and inclusive manner, giving visibility to the opportunities and limitations of DDR within the broader peace negotiations framework. Over a yearlong period, the SIDDR involved representatives from governments, international organizations, academic institutions and military experts in serious discussions on these issues and commissioned several studies. These efforts have resulted in an increased understanding of the political aspects of DDR, and SIDDR aims to make a strong contribution to an improved framework in which DDR processes can be well planned and effectively implemented.

Parallel key processes are the United Nations' internal "Integrated DDR Standards", the African Union's policy work on small arms and light weapons and the Worlds Bank's regional program for Central Africa, Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP). The MDRP is a multi-agency effort that supports the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants in the greater Great Lakes region of Central Africa. It currently targets an estimated 450,000 ex-combatants in seven countries: Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda, and has a very strong component on young combatants.

The United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Africa is organizing an international conference on DDR and stability in Africa which will take place in February 2007 in Kinshasa, and focus on DDR issues in the Great Lakes region. This is a follow up to the Sierra Leone conference in 2005, and is aimed at improving effectiveness of DDR in Africa by facilitating exchanges of experiences, information and knowledge between African countries faced with this problem. The goal will be to identify "best practices" and "lessons learned".

There is no doubt that the current policy environment is very favorable, but there is still scope for improvement. An example from Liberia shows that although UN Security Council resolution 1509 mandated that specific attention be paid to child and women combatants in Liberia's disarmament programs, the planners of the disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation program (DDR) failed to design the program to account adequately for the needs of these combatants. The DDR program for former child combatants was characterized by fraud and time-consuming problems that should have been worked out in the planning stages. For example, the decision to pay the former child combatants a cash stipend was especially problematic because the cash was not used for productive investments in education or economic opportunity. Many of these children are still in thrall to their commanders and the cash was turned back over to commanders. Also, many are still hooked on drugs. One humanitarian organization in Liberia said that

when the adolescents received the initial $75 (of a $300 payment) they used it for marijuana and other drugs that are easily available in the country. Further, providing cash to former young combatants can be perceived as rewarding those who took part in the conflict.[35]

Also, despite clear policies to take into account the needs of girls and young women in DDR programs - and efforts are being made to incorporate their special needs, gender experts still believe that the programs, while addressing some of the needs of girls and young women, may still allow many in this vulnerable population, to fall through the cracks.

The challenges facing governments, donors and civil society in implementing effective reintegration of youth and ex-combatants into society need to be addressed by ensuring that young people are regarded as a positive resource and a force change in post-conflict environments, rather than as a 'problem' in need of a solution. In this regard, the need for a longer term vision when planning reintegration components of DDR programs. Thus, the role of regional institutions and agencies such as the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in enhancing the participation of youth as partners in peace and development in post-conflict countries is essential. NEPAD has already clearly established the promotion of peace and security and sound political, economic and corporate governance in Africa, with the participation of all segments of society, including youth as key priorities in its action plan. The challenge will be to successfully channel positive energy and resourcefulness of the young into key participatory decision-making and development processes.

5. Policy Recommendations: Governments, NGOs, Regional and International Bodies

Demobilization and Family reunification
- Ensure that DDR programs offer incentives for youth and former young combatants to demobilize and disarm. Young people need to be provided with a means to access employment and secure livelihoods.
- Facilitate the establishment of safe environments to break the security dilemma by ensuring that all parties in conflict are included in the DDR program and disarm at the same time. It is important that all parties develop ownership of the process and do not feel discriminated against.
- Develop effective mechanisms for the harmonization of DDR policies in the country. External observers and peacekeepers should be perceived by all sides to be impartial, neutral, and credible. Credible DDR processes can reinforce cease-fire agreements and be a confidence-building measure.
- Ensure that DDR programs are holistic and the various phases well integrated and coordinated by the different actors at the local and national levels. Disarmament without reintegration, and demobilization without previous disarmament and planned economic and social reintegration, are short-lived efforts.

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[35] Sarah Martin and Fidele Lumeya, "Liberia: Payments to Disarm Child Soldiers Create Protection Problems" in Refugee International

- Facilitate the establishment of clear mechanisms for young women to have adequate access to DDR benefits. Female combatants, abducted girls, and families of combatants often are not reached by DDR programs.

Social and Political Reintegration
- Ensure both the immediate short-term and the long-term reintegration of youths and ex-combatants and identify effective mechanisms for linkages between these two components.
- Facilitate psychological recovery of youth affected by armed conflicts through the establishment of critical social networks in an environment of forgiveness and family and community acceptance.
- Develop effective programs for family and community participation in educational and economic opportunities for the youth in order to facilitate reintegration and prevent possible re-recruitment or return to violence to gain basic life needs.
- Facilitate the establishment of programs that bolster feelings of empowerment and security among children and youth. Feelings of helplessness and lack of security are often not perception problems, but very real.
- Facilitate the development of programs that take into account local notions of childhood and youth, of distress and trauma, and of healing and reconciliation. It is critical that such programs involve the participation, and direct engagement of local communities in their formulation and implementation.
- Ensure that reintegration programs give special attention to the situations young women who have experienced sexual abuse, and are isolated due to rejection from families and/or communities.
- Ensure youth participation in political processes by facilitating the establishment of a youth civil society groups and caucus on political issues relevant to them.
- Articulate a strong political agenda that place youth as central partners in peace and development in post-conflict settings.
- Support young people in their efforts to positive citizenship, political activism and contribution to societal processes.

Economic Reintegration
- Identify specific training needs for youth's and ex-combatants that will guarantee short and medium term relieve to economic hardship. Support the planning of long-term training to ensure stable employment and livelihoods.
- Ensure the provision of transitional education after disarming and prior to demobilization. In some countries such programs have been launched by local institutions and some demobilization packages have also included educational scholarships for those over 18.
- Facilitate programs aimed at ensuring youth's and ex-combatants economic integration, through long term employment and sustainable financial independence.
- Support and facilitate programs that cater to the special needs of disabled youths and ex-combatants who cannot reintegrate into the labor force, for both rural and urban settlers. Good economic integration programs should include education and

professional training, public employment, encouragement of private initiative through skills development and micro-credit support, as well as access to land.

Enabling Policy Environment
- Ensure local communities participation in programs aimed at preventing and protecting children and youth from taking part in direct hostilities. Effective prevention, healing and reintegration needs to be embedded in local norms and value systems. Complete reliance on governments and international organizations alone may not be fully effective.
- Ensure that key mechanisms are put in place to facilitate, the inclusion of children and youth's needs in the general plans for reconstruction and development in post-conflict from an early stage.
- Demonstrate political will to enhance and ensure the participation of youth as partners in peace and development in post-conflict countries. Regional bodies such as the AU and NEPAD have a critical role to play in this regard.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, official and NGO-sponsored programs for the demobilization and social reintegration of boys and girls while successful in tracing unaccompanied children and reunifying them with family, relatives, or foster families in the communities, still face serious challenges with regard to provision of support services—education, healthcare, employment, food and proper shelter—in the post-reunification period. War-affected youth have often to sort themselves out alone. While some manage to cope with their situation through local basic support schemes and solidarity networks, others migrate to urban areas for employment, where the majority become street children or are associated with criminal groups. This pattern shows that, while community processes of reintegration are important and can help the children emotionally, poverty and lack of social provisions prevent them from gaining access to school, healthcare, and employment and becoming full and active citizens.

The paper argues that rehabilitation and social reintegration of youth affected by armed conflict should go hand-in-hand with larger strategies of social development and poverty eradication. The various intervention programs aimed at curbing the problem of children affected by armed conflict face, in my view, two major challenges: On the one hand, the challenge of culture – understanding the worldviews and normative/value systems that guide people's actions in the affected areas; and on the other, the challenge of addressing the structural causes of armed conflict that continue after cease fires and peace agreements.

From the analysis presented above, it is clear the inability of such programs to deal with the serious problems of poverty and underdevelopment which, no doubt, have a direct impact on young people's involvement in conflict. The total societal crisis which both results from and, more importantly, produces these civil wars is what propels children and youngsters into military activity and at the same time limits their prospects for a

better future. Former combatants and captives do not return to "normal" life but join communities completed ravaged by war. The local economy is in a familiar sort of shambles, with few resources available to subsistence-oriented producers and lots of factors inducing or propelling people to migrate to low–wage jobs or prostitution in urban centers, furthering the cycle of underdevelopment and the distortion of social relations. As for the state, political participation is absent or irrelevant, and basic state structures are absent or do not serve the masses of people. So, what would be required to address the consequences of armed conflict is exactly the same as what would be required to prevent such conflicts from occurring in the first place.

In sum, the solutions to the problems suffered by young people in situations of armed conflicts are the very same measures that would prevent the occurrence of such conflicts. Addressing the "total societal crisis" in such states requires fundamental economic, social, and political transformation, a long-term perspective, and democratic participation in the process of change. The future of Africa's youth depends on the solution to poverty and global inequality; and the future of Africa depends on its youth.

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