

**Participatory Approaches to Girls' Reintegration:  
Lessons from Participatory Action Research in  
Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Northern Uganda**

**Girl Mothers in Armed Forces and Groups and  
Their Children in Northern Uganda, Liberia, and  
Sierra Leone**

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Participatory Action Research (PAR) to assess and improve the situation of girl mothers in armed forces and groups and their children

- Participation is a buzz word in the development field currently
  - Shortage of actual participation in the field
  - Participation acts more as an afterthought (Not a central principal)
- Re-integration Efforts are adult centric
  - Security sector reform is aimed at youth eradication to end conflict
  - Holistic needs of youth are rarely considered (singular approaches too often focus on the Disarmament and Demobilization process and not enough of the Reintegration process)

Why do PAR?

- Reintegration has been constructed according to adult ideas without including girls' voices. Agency programs have, in the main, been ineffective in reducing stigma and facilitating girls' economic livelihoods
- Girl mothers' reintegration into the community is a shared responsibility between the community and affected girls.
- Girls are often invisible (A double stigma exists for girls who are rebel controlled)
- DDR is usually implemented by men, for men -- issues such as reproductive health do not often receive attention

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):

- Children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant in their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard

Paris Principles (2007)

- Call for specific assistance within a supportive environment in negotiating emotional and practical challenges girl mothers face

IDDRS Standards (2008)

- Recommended that girls be involved in participatory discussions about programs designed for their reintegration and that the capacity of families and communities be developed to care for and encourage girls.
- Girl participation in reintegration necessary
- Meaningful reintegration comes in relation to family

Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review (2009)

- Advocated broader and comprehensive reintegration programs that include girls should seek approaches that are durable inclusive, flexible, grounded in the community, based on child rights, and outside of formal DDR processes
- Broader/Informal processes needed that are grounded in the community

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

- **Core Principle:** Generation of knowledge (rather than its 'extraction') through a merging of academic with local knowledge
- **Participants** (girl mothers) define and implement *social action* and research their most relevant concerns
- It is necessary that girls both define the problem and initiate social action

## Funding

- Rockefeller Foundation
  - 22 organizations/partners to analyze problem
  - Different ideas
  - Agency meetings
    - Countries selected agencies that assembled a team to ask how to do participation
- Oak foundation/UNICEF/Compton Fund

## Co-Investigators

- Angela Veale
- Miranda Worthen
- Susan McKay
- Mike Wessells

## Agency and Academic Partners

- Data gathering within own countries
- Total participants = 658
  - Most in Sierra Leone and Uganda
- Capacity building (training)
- Each agency had people on the ground
- One-on-one interactions
- A blend of agencies supported the initiative
  - Sierra Leone: Christian Children's Fund, Christian Brothers, Council of Churches in Sierra Leone, National Network for Psychosocial Care
  - Liberia: Save the Children/UK, THINK
  - Uganda: Caritas, Concerned Parents Association, Transcultural Psychosocial Organization, World Vision

## Do No Harm

- Code of Conduct
- No Research without action
- Manage expectations
- Confidentiality
- Informed consent
- Avoid excessive targeting
- Ethical interviewing
- U. of Wyoming IRB and local consultation
  - Create norm of ethical reflection
  - Ethics dialogue
  - Publishing and discussing results (partnerships)
  - Published nothing until study was finished

## Selection of Participants

- Planned for half of participants to be girls CAAFAG and other vulnerable girl mothers
- Agencies identified two field sites for each study implementation where both groups were present in significant numbers
- Field site facilitators invited girl mother participation via the community and families
- The goal was 30 girls for each field site

### Girl Mothers' Peer Groups Develop Within the context of their Communities

- Research their situations and support each other
- Define problems they want to address
- Create social actions for change
- Iterative project development (a rework scheduling strategy in which time is set aside to revise and improve)
- The group must determine their own problems
- Flexibility is a large component of this groups

### Role of Community Advisors

- Facilitated girls' social and economic reintegration
- Provided a crucial link between the girl mothers' group and the larger community
- Acted as intermediaries who encouraged the girls and supplied pragmatic advice
- Helped girls manage conflict
- Gave psychosocial support

### Role of Community

- Monitoring and supporting girls
- Advising other community members on how to interact with girls
- Issuing proclamations protecting the girls
- Reaching out to parents and encouraging family reintegration
- Giving emotional support
- Donating land and material support to the projects

### Data Gathering

- Field site visits
- Ethnography
- Survey of girls
- Monthly reports
- Yearly team meetings
- Documentation by girls (photos, dramas, minutes)