

**Washington Network on Children and Armed Conflict**  
***Finding A Balance: Meeting the Needs of Former Child Soldiers & Other Children Affected  
by Armed Conflict***

Meeting Notes, November 18, 2004

The third meeting of the Washington Network on Children in Armed Conflict was convened with the US Campaign to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, on Thursday, November 18, 2004, following the release of the Child Soldiers Global Report 2004 Edition. The meeting focused on the issues and challenges of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs for child soldiers and discussed good practices for community-based and holistic reintegration programs. Jo Becker of Human Rights Watch, Mike Wessells of the Christian Children's Fund, and Lynne Cripe of USAID's Displaced Children & Orphan's Fund framed the discussion with brief presentations on the progress and problems in the effort to help children affected by armed conflict.

**Discussion Points:**

*Issues & Challenges of DDR for child soldiers:*

- The programs available serve only a small portion of the children who need them.
- DDR programs often have their start significantly delayed.
- Re-recruitment remains a major problem, often making DDR a virtual revolving door.
- Although progress has been made, DDR programs often don't reach girls.
- Child soldiers become their commanders' bargaining chips during negotiations or in cases where the ceasefire may break down.
- There is a lack of match and/or balance between the vocational training offered to former child soldiers and those skills that they may already have (ie, medic).
- DDR processes are not always designed using the good practices from the field.

*Good practices for community-based reintegration programs:*

- A separate children's DDR process
- Integrated programming for all children affected by armed conflict
- Gender equity
- Do no harm, including no cash disbursements to child soldiers, no discrimination by role, no false promises
- Long-term funding structure
- Focus on resilience; do not neglect children's agency
- Adequate impact evaluation (evidence-based practice)
- Culturally-grounded approaches
- Reinforce existing community capacities
- Family reunification is *not* a silver bullet; the process of reintegration is multi-layered and therefore should include community sensitization efforts, access to education, income-earning opportunities, and psychosocial healing.

Key questions:

- What are the indicators of successful reintegration? When can we move from targeted youth to addressing all children's needs? At what point can programming be deemed successful?
- How can practitioners build a stronger evidence-base? What should we know about kids that do *not* participate in DDR programs? Are there interventions that are more useful than others? Ones that are more palatable to donors?
- How do children understand their situation? What is their perspective on DDR programs? Does it vary by gender and/or age?
- How do young women's experiences, like having lived through domestic violence, prior to conflict affect their experiences afterwards?
- How should donors and practitioners account for justice issues for child soldiers, and how does it affect the reconciliation process?
- Who should be involved in planning DDR processes?

**Resources & Program Sharing:**

- *2004 Global Report of the U.S. Campaign to Stop Child Soldiers*, available at <http://www.child-soldiers.org> (contains a DDR section for every country)
- Social Science Research Council initiative to pull together all research on children in armed conflict. To learn more, please visit <http://www.ssrc.org/programs/children/>
- Peter Singer, **Children at War** (comprehensive and global look at child soldiers), January 11, 2005, Pantheon Press.
- Jessica Lenz, **Armed with Resilience** (Reintegrating girls in Northern Uganda), available in early 2005.
- *Children and Youth on the Frontline: Ethnography, Armed Conflict and Displacement*, available August 2005.

Please send other resources to the Washington Network on Children and Armed Conflict, email [mshiplier@sfcg.org](mailto:mshiplier@sfcg.org).

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