Analysis of the Situation of Children Affected by Armed Conflict in the Niger Delta and Northern Region of Nigeria

Search for Common Ground in Nigeria

Final Report to UNICEF

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Contact:

Susan Shepler
School of International Service, American University
Washington DC
Shepler@american.edu
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Susan Shepler
Washington DC
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I. Executive Summary

This document describes a research project to assess the situation of children affected by armed conflict in the Niger Delta and Northern Region of Nigeria. The goals of the research were to describe the following five areas:

1. Different ways that children are being used by armed groups/gangs/cults.
2. Socio-economic characteristics and issues concerning children being used by armed groups/gangs/cults.
3. Ways different protection concerns and risks compound the situation of CAAC.
4. Identification of situations in which children are most at risk of being associated with armed groups/gangs/cults.
5. Assess presence and capacity of current child protection structures.

Qualitative research methods were used. A group of six researchers carried out 120 interviews and 16 focus group discussions with a range of respondents in four cities (Jos, Bauchi, Warri, and Port Harcourt).

The results show that children are involved in armed groups, gangs, and cults in Nigeria. The recruitment, participation, and pathways out of armed groups vary depending on the type of group, and hence localized and particular solutions will be needed to address the problem. However, there are common risk factors. Certain groups are more vulnerable, including street children and those without educational or employment opportunities. Girls are also involved in armed groups. The state must be involved in any efforts to address the issue, though many we interviewed see politicians’ involvement in funding and otherwise supporting various armed groups, as well as linkages between the security forces and certain armed groups. Although there are laws and policies that address children’s rights, these need to be domesticated to the states, and the gaps between official policy and actual practice need to be addressed.

Overall, this research should lead to increased recognition of the participation of children in armed groups, gangs, and cults as a child protection issue as well as a security issue.
II. Introduction, Literature Review, Theoretical Framing

Despite direct and indirect impact of the on-going violence and conflicts on children in Nigeria, there has been little targeted intervention to support and protect children affected by armed conflict, particularly those who are associated with armed groups, gangs and cults. This is partly because so little is known about these children and their situations. This study of the experiences of children associated with armed groups is vital and timely. It innovatively links the concerns of child protection and the increasing concern with Nigeria’s security situation.

This introduction will spell out the goals of the assessment, review the small amount of existing research on these populations, and frame the issues theoretically.

The goals of the assessment are spelled out clearly in the Term of Reference.

A) Purpose of the Study

The assessment will shed much needed lights on the situation of children affected by armed conflict (CAAC) - particularly of those used by various natures of armed groups as well as those who are at risk of being manipulated into armed conflict and unrest situations. The information will be critical to guide UNICEF and its child protection partners to determine new programmatic strategies and action for CAAC during the UNICEF-Government of Nigeria Mid-Term Review process.

The study provides regional-specific recommendations for actions for which UNICEF Field Offices will be responsible for following up, with necessary technical assistance and guidance from the Child Protection Section in the Country Office.

B) Areas of the Assessment and Key Questions

The assessment addressed the following issues:

1. Different ways that children are being used by armed groups/gangs/cults in the on-going conflict in the Niger Delta region and recurring communal/religious/ethnic violence in the North;
a. How are children lured into violent activities?
b. What kind of activities are children most likely to be involved in?
c. What are direct gains for children?
d. How does social network of the child influence his/her involvement in violence? (family/relative’s involvement/association, neighbourhood dynamics, religious groups, etc.).

2. Socio-economic characteristics and issues concerning children being used by armed groups/gangs/cults:
   a. family situation
   b. safe access to basic services (health, education, water)
   c. livelihood concerns
   d. social exclusion

3. Ways different protection concerns and risks compound the situation of the children associated with armed groups/gangs:
   a. drug (use/trade)
   b. small arms (use/trade)
   c. interaction with law enforcement/security forces
   d. sexual exploitation
   e. HIV/STD/STI

4. Identification of situations in which children become most at risk of being associated with armed groups/gangs/cults and how effective prevention measures targeting a wider population of at risk children can be introduced. Particularly in the South, special attention is to be paid to urban poverty and at-risk children. Identification of “entry points” for possible interventions in terms of direct support to the affected children.

The assessment will also look at the present context of child protection support for children associated with armed groups/gangs/cults.
5. Presence and capacity (and gap) of child protection government and non-governmental actors
   a. Monitoring & reporting rights violations
   b. Child protection services
   c. Community sensitization and awareness raising, particularly addressing risks related to urban poverty

C) Process and Methodology

This assessment uses qualitative methods including desk review of existing documentations, field visits, individual interviews, and focus group discussions with professionals and informants. The focus is on individual in-depth interviews by which more detail information about individual respondents can be obtained. (See the methodology section for greater detail).

D) Stakeholder Participation

The study seeks to engage local organizations that report cases and interact with children affected by armed conflict (children associated with armed groups in particular), families, community leaders, faith-based organizations, youth groups, health care providers, teachers, small business owners, I/NGOs, diplomats, national and international journalists, and government agencies and ministries. UNICEF provided introduction letters and facilitated interactions with all the above.
The relationship between children and youth and conflict has come under increasing interest over the past two decades, starting with Graça Machel’s groundbreaking work on the impact of armed conflict on children (Machel 1996). Scholars at the World Bank and elsewhere have made the demographic argument that large numbers of young people in a population increase the likelihood of violent conflict, the so-called “youth bulge” argument (Urdal 2004). UNICEF and others primarily concerned with child rights and child protection have focused on the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former child soldiers in conflicts around the world, as well as the provision of health, safety, and education programs for children affected by conflict.
However, this body of expertise and best practices have yet to be applied in Nigeria. A great deal of literature has been generated on the multiple conflicts that exist in Nigeria and the multitude of armed groups that have emerged, particularly since the transition from military to civilian rule opened the door for greater political competition. Groups like Human Rights Watch (HRW) and International Crisis Group (ICG) have released several reports analysing political and electoral violence (HRW, 2007, 2004, 2003b), restiveness in the Niger Delta (HRW, 2008, 2003, 2002) (ICG 2009, 2006a, 2006b), and the ethno-political conflict in Plateau state among other states in the North (HRW 2009, 2005, 2001) (ICG, 2010). While this literature provides a general background on the conflict, almost nothing has been written specifically about the role children and youth play in these armed groups.

F) Child/Youth

Although UNICEF operates with a very clear definition of its target group, i.e. children under 18, the definition of “child” and “youth” are variable across different contexts. One of the challenges facing those trying to examine youth involvement with violent groups is to first determine what constitutes inclusion as “youth.” The United Nations uses the range of 15-24 years of age to classify youth while the Nigerian government, according to its 2001 National Youth Policy, uses an expanded range, 18-35 years of age, in its classification. Indeed, the UN definition of “youth” includes a set of people who are considered both children and youth according to these standards. However, others argue that societal determination of what constitutes being a “youth” is more based on activities the individual are involved in and the deference given to them by society rather than biological age. In the Niger Delta context, Oluwaniyi (2010) describes how the term “youth” is much more fluid or inclusive than the age ranges set by the literature and policy organs. He argues that the term has come to encompass anyone who is involved with liberation struggles or the fight for resource control. Last (2005) similarly describes how, in the Hausa community, the distinction between youth and elder has become increasingly blurred, as politics, once a game for elders and elites, has increasingly, with the modern political system, welcomed the participation of youth.

But more important than the various overlapping legal definitions is the fact that the categories are flexible in practice in Nigeria and have different meanings to the different classes
of respondents our researchers talked with. Youth is a kind of liminal stage between childhood and adulthood. The cultural distinction between child and youth also varies depending on gender, class, and urban or rural setting. For example, girls are often considered to be adults once they have given birth, even if they are under 18. Whereas young men may remain “youth” well into their thirties if they have not achieved economic self-sufficiency (see, e.g. Sommers 2007).

For example, those who work for the government or for civil society organizations familiar with the international standards were likely to talk about children as strictly under 18.

For example, during the course of the research a Police representative in Port Harcourt told us: “A child offender of less than 12 years is kept behind the counter to allow police to carry out an investigation. If they are found guilty, the child offenders are not put into custody but are taken to the Juvenile Section. If a child of 14 years is involved in arms they are no longer considered children but juveniles” (interview #35). This quote shows that regardless of international or national standards, local practice may operate with respect to local understandings of when a child becomes a youth.

Because child and youth were used interchangeably at times by our respondents, it is necessary in the research to adopt a similarly flexible definition of terms. This choice is not unusual among anthropological work on children and youth, where the flexibility of the terms by gender, class, ethnic group, and urban/rural divide is regularly acknowledged (Boyden and de Berry 2004, Shepler 2004, Honwana 2006, McEvoy-Levy 2006, Wells 2009). In this research the team decided to keep the terms flexible to reflect the ways they are used by respondents.

G) Child Soldier

Although Nigeria has not experienced war since the Biafran conflict ended in 1970, there have certainly been episodes of armed violence throughout the country’s post-independence history. So, although it may not be completely accurate to use the term “child soldier” in the Nigerian context, we believe that some of the scholarly and practitioner work around the issue of
Children over the past several decades may be applicable to the Nigerian context. As Luke Dowdney (2005, 337) puts it, "Children and youth in organised armed violence are not child soldiers and should not be referred to as such. However, there is much to gain from exchanging knowledge of good practice for the treatment of both distinct yet similar situations." The goal is to find ways that the growing body of child soldier knowledge could be applicable across multiple Nigerian contexts.

In particular, the international community defines a child soldier, or a “child associated with an armed force or armed group,” (CAAFAG) as “any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys, and girls used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities” (The Paris Principles: The Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups 2007, 7).

Work on child soldiering has led to insights into how children are recruited into armed groups, why armed groups recruit children, what children do while affiliated with armed groups, and various pathways out of participation with armed groups (Boyden and de Berry 2004, Shepler 2004, Boothby, et al. 2006, Honwana 2006, Wessells 2007, Coulter 2009). All of these bases of knowledge can be applied in the Nigeria case.

Nigeria Cases:
A number of case studies reveal the history and unique aspects of recruitment and involvement of youth in individual gangs and militant organizations in Nigeria. Adebanwi (2005) gave an in depth look at a Yoruba nationalist group called the Oodua People’s Congress (OPC), which rose to prominence shortly after the transition to civilian rule in 1999. Smith (2004) offers a similar examination of the Bakassi Boys, a popular vigilante group in south-eastern Nigeria. Ibrahim (n.d.) conducted surveys amongst members of three militant youth groups including the OPC, the Egbesu Boys of the Niger Delta, and the Bakassi Boys. Other cases have focused on violent youth groups in Ebiraland (Tenuche 2009), Ijebu-Remo (Nolte 2004), as well as the Area Boys in Lagos (Momoh 2000).
H) Typology of Armed Groups

A review of the literature reveals that there are different types of groups that operate in Nigeria. Hazen and Homer (2007) present a typology of armed groups operating in the Niger Delta, classifying groups into ethnic militias, confraternities or cults, vigilante groups, and criminal gangs (see chart). However, even Hazen and Homer acknowledge the difficulty in such a classification as these names are often used interchangeably and groups could fall under multiple classifications (73).
### Typology of Armed Groups in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Support base</th>
<th>Area of operations</th>
<th>Main Activities</th>
<th>Arms</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic militias</strong></td>
<td>Aims are to redress grievances and injustices and protect and defend the rights of the ethnic group</td>
<td>Ethnic group; other sympathetic ethnic groups</td>
<td>Typically grassroots organizations receiving widespread support; able to mobilize more widely</td>
<td>Communities of ethnic group; also across states where ethnic group is dominant</td>
<td>Defence of ethnic group rights might include: political protest, attacks on politicians, attacks on oil pipelines, kidnapping, oil bunkering</td>
<td>Paramilitary groups; of all armed groups, best trained, armed, organized; usually armed with sophisticated weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confraternities/cults</strong></td>
<td>Self-enrichment and defending territory</td>
<td>Confraternities: students; Cults: unemployed youth</td>
<td>Members; alliances with other armed groups; politicians</td>
<td>Confraternities tend to be on campus, similar to US fraternities; cults operate off campus, tend to be the more violent of the two; localized area operation</td>
<td>Control and defend territory; drug trafficking; oil bunkering; reputation for being brutal and secretive, with elaborate rituals for initiation</td>
<td>Not all are armed; most are armed; prospective members must demonstrate bravery and ability to use weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vigilante groups</strong></td>
<td>Provide security to communities; provide law and order services in areas where police presence is minimal; provide economic opportunities for members</td>
<td>Community organization</td>
<td>Community support; community funding through dues; many receive government support</td>
<td>Localized area of operations; usually at community level</td>
<td>Activities aimed at community security; sometimes administer physical punishments to suspects, or take the law into their own hands; some groups work with police to enforce law and order</td>
<td>Not all are armed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criminal gangs</strong></td>
<td>Economic gain</td>
<td>Unemployed youth</td>
<td>Members; politicians</td>
<td>Dominate particular neighbourhoods; localized area of operations</td>
<td>Engage in armed robbery and other criminal activities</td>
<td>Not all are armed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the purposes and the activities of these groups are different, the analyses of youth involvement in violent groups in Nigeria reveal similar themes of economic, political, and social exclusion and marginalization as well as a security vacuum created by a weak state.

**Economic Factors**

One of the most common explanations for youth participation in violent groups is that involvement often provides a source of livelihood that children and youth are unable to obtain in the traditional market economy. Akinwumi (2006) points to structural adjustment programs pursued in the 1980s following the crash of the oil markets as the source of the high levels of unemployment amongst youth, even those that are educated. In his interview with members of ethnic militias from across the country, he reports that 75% of his participants claimed to have joined these groups, in part, because of frustration resulting from lack of employment.

Kakwagh and Ikwuba (2010) also cite unemployment as a major cause of youth involvement in violent groups. Contributing factors to high unemployment include a growing population that is outpacing the creation of new jobs, the movement of youth to cities, and the deterioration of the education and vocational training system. They describe the response of the Nigerian government as “grossly inadequate” as its policies fail to directly address the livelihood needs and expectations of youth. Lack of employment and educational opportunities for children and youth have led to the increase of the number of street children and the growth of urban gangs.

**Political Factors**

Another often cited cause of youth involvement with violent groups is youth exclusion from decision-making processes. As Nolte (2004) describes, the term youth is often conceptualized as a counter group to traditional elders and elite, those that have access to power structures. The growth of youth involvement in violence is, in part, a response to this exclusion. Strategies of protest and rebellion have become means of attempting to access the political and financial power of the state, especially since the transition to civilian rule in 1999. Similarly, Last (2005) chronicles the history of “youth coups” in Northern Nigeria, citing points at which Hausa youth have played major roles in societal shifts. Particularly since the end of colonial rule, politics have increasingly become the realm of the young, altering the traditional, elder-centred
power dynamics in the regions. Further, the influx of oil-wealth have increased the incentives for seeking political office, a source of power within society previously inaccessible to youth, furthering the rise of competition and political violence.

**State Weakness**

Much of the literature points to the weakness or fragility of the Nigerian state as a factor in both motivating youth participation in and the proliferation of violent groups in the country. The lack of capacity of police and security forces has resulted in the rise of youth-led vigilante groups throughout the country. These groups have moved beyond the function of providing street justice and neighbourhood security, instead reflecting religious, ethnic, and political dimensions of conflict (Pratten 2008). The most notorious example of vigilantism in Nigeria is the Bakassi Boys, a primarily Igbo group in the south-eastern portion of the country. The group emerged in response to the rise of criminal gangs in the market city of Aba, but quickly grew to a popular movement reflecting undertones of Igbo-nationalism, traditional beliefs of supernaturalism, and political tensions as their activities devolved into political thuggery on behalf of political figures (Smith 2004). Further, Akinwumi (2006) cites two decades of military rule as the source of the militarization of Nigerian society, where violence is seen as an acceptable, and often times the only means to gaining access to power and wealth.

**Social Change**

The rise of violent groups in Nigeria has also been accompanied by the convergence of societal changes. As Egbue (2006) describes, globalization and Westernization have contributed to a breakdown in traditional societal structures and created greater expectations of wealth and materialism amongst youth. The lack of employment opportunities combined with the demands of a highly patriarchal society leave young males looking for other outlets to prove their masculinity, leaving them prime for recruitment for criminal gangs or ethnic militias. Further, these groups provide young men a source of positive group identity (Matusitz and Repass 2009). At the same time, the country is also experiencing an increase in religiosiy, both in the predominantly Muslim North and Christian South, as well as a revival of traditional beliefs (Akinwumi 2006). Ifeka (2006) describes how youth, in particular, have re-presented political and economic frustrations in religious terms or through the fetishization of violence, which helps
provide meaning in the context of a clash between traditional kinship-based community structures and the capitalist-driven demand for resources.

These societal shifts have also given rise to youth participation in cults, secret societies primarily found within the country’s university system. In his survey of the rise of secret cults in Nigerian universities Rotimi (2005) cites the desire for group involvement, need of financial assistance or security, and curiosity as reasons for youth joining such groups. Egbue (2006) points to the changing environment of educational institutions as a source of youth violence and involvement with groups like university cults. Inadequate and dilapidated facilities and the involvement of teachers in bribery and grade buying have helped breed mistrust and sense of victimization. Furthermore, competition and corruption, particularly in the university system, have led to increased participation and conflict between cult groups.

**The Rise of Urban Violence**

Africa is experiencing significant demographic shifts, particularly the movement of people from rural areas to cities due to environmental pressures, conflict, and the lure of economic opportunities. Current trends predict that more than half of Africans will live in cities by 2025, bringing with them the problems often associated with overcrowded urban centres, including the greater potential for urban violence (Commins 2011). This potential is compounded by the growing rates of urban unemployment, particularly among youth who amass in urban centres.

More so in West Africa than in the rest of the continent, rapid urbanization has not resulted in a comparable rise in economic growth or policies directed towards proper urban planning. As a result, the masses are forced into slums or squatter settlements. According to a UN report on urbanization in West Africa, 72% of urban dwellers in Africa live in slums, which have become hotbeds for instability, crime, and sporadic violence (United Nations Office for West Africa, 2007).

Nigeria is one of the countries that is most impacted by growing urbanization, having more large cities and a higher urban population than any other country in Africa. This rapid urbanization has strained resources and an already weak state, creating an environment prone to violence. In Jos,
Plateau State, competition for political power and control of the limited economic, social, and environmental resources within growing urban centres has resulted in intercommunal violence. The conflict centres around the question over who is indigenous, and therefore, rightful owners of land, resources, and political power, producing violence, particularly in areas where predominantly Christian and Muslim neighbourhoods bump up against one another (Dung-Gwom, 2009).

The rise of gangs can also be attributed to the rapid urbanization of Nigerian cities. Port Harcourt remains the epicentre for urban gangs. Oruwari (2006) describes how these urban gangs, primarily based on ethnic identity, have become prevalent in low income and densely populated areas, particularly in Port Harcourt’s squatter settlements known as “watersides”. Gangs in Port Harcourt vary in size, territory, and level activities. While some are composed of a handful of neighbourhood boys, others have connections to cults, and the largest groups operate throughout river state and are loosely affiliated to militant groups like the Niger Delta Vigilante Group (NDVG) and the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), have been involved in attacks against oil facilities and claim to fight for resource control. Competition between the two groups has also produced violence.

Despite their location in urban areas, the existing literature suggests that marginalization economically, politically, and socially, as well as a lack of security remain major themes that underline reasons for why both urban and rural youth join armed groups.

**Street Children and Child Protection**

- Aderinto conducted a comparison study of street children and non-street children in Lagos and Ibadan in South-western Nigeria. The study found that street children were mostly male, have low-levels of education and tend to come from large families where the father practices polygyny. Their parents tend to be poorly educated and are typically artisans or traders. It also concluded that children take to the streets largely due to parent and familial reasons, primarily the inability of the parents to provide for the children (Aderinto, 2000)
Okpukpara *et al.* provide an econometric examination of the relationship between poverty and schooling in Nigeria, including a detailed examination of street children. He finds that a combination of poverty and parental disinterest in sending children to school are primary factor in the number of children who do not attend school, and instead, find themselves living or working on the street (Okpukpara, 2006).

A report for UNICEF looks at the strengths and weaknesses of child protection services across West Africa identifying five structural factors that hinder the provision of these services. The factors include the extent of poverty, the nature of inequity, supply-side weaknesses in basic social services, fiscal space and governance/administrative constraints (Hodges, N.D).

Other studies look at the issue of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria, including sending children to the streets to work to earn additional income for the family. Ebigbo examines a survey that assessed the perception of child abuse in Nigeria, finding that people generally view child abuse (including sending children to work) as a family matter and would not intervene or report it to authorities (Ebigbo, 2003)

A report by the Cleen Foundation and World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) describes how children are often swept up by mass arrests. The report goes on to detail the conditions within Nigeria’s juvenile justice system, including demographic and socio-economic statistics of those within the system (Alemika, 2005).

**None of these sources talk about the socio-economic, demographic, or other factors that lead to children’s involvement in violence or with armed groups.**

*Niger Delta*

Unemployment is one of the most salient and most cited reasons for youth involvement in ethnic militias fighting for resource control in the Niger Delta. For youth, involvement is not only a means for seeking a livelihood, but it is also a means to express their grievance over what they see as deliberate exclusion from employment opportunities. As Ukeje (2006) describes, the unemployment issues are to some degree linked to oil extraction as youth feel that they have been purposely denied positions within the extractives industry. Similarly, Oluwaniyi (2010), in his survey of youth in communities in Delta and Bayelsa states, finds inability to find employment, particularly in the extractives industry, as a major grievance amongst youth. He
also cites lack of social welfare and infrastructure, unfulfilled promises from oil companies, and lack of resource control as the major grievances of youth.

Another major source of grievance of youth in the Niger Delta is political exclusion, particularly when it comes to decision-making processes related to oil extraction and the distribution of development funds. Arowosegbe (2009) describes how youth have largely been marginalized by elite-centric politics and the centralization of resource control from communities to the federal government. He explains how youth responded to their exclusion by forming activist groups like the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), who ardently advocate for resource control for the communities of the region. Both Arowosegbe and Obi (2006) describe how groups using nonviolent protest have been radicalized or have had break-off groups that use more violent tactics including attacks against oil infrastructure, kidnapping, illegal bunkering, and other oil-related crimes.

Much like the literature describing youth involvement in violent groups in other regions in Nigeria, Oyefusi (2010) describes how unemployment and lack of education are leading factors in youth violence, however he does note that while education does reduce participation in low level crime, more educated individuals, particularly those in oil producing communities, are more likely to be involved with militant groups. At the same time, however, education was also shown to increase individuals’ preference of expressing grievances through peaceful protest and opposition to the criminalization of the conflict.

**North**

With a renewed outbreak of violence between Muslim and Christian groups in the country’s middle belt, centred in Jos in Plateau state, much attention has been paid to the socio-economic and political factors that have given rise to intercommunal and interreligious violence. However, Boko Haram presents a different challenge. As Adesoji (2010) describes, the July 2009 Boko Haram uprising was significant in that it directly challenged the legitimacy of the state, while at the same time promoting Islamic revivalism. Headquartered in Maiduguri in Borno State, Boko Haram is an Orthodox Islamist sect whose aim is to replace the Nigerian state with strict Islamic sharia law. Instead of violence being directed towards Christian groups and structures, a majority of the groups’ victims have been Muslim and attacks have primarily been targeted at government institutions, particularly police.
As Ousman (2004) describes, there has been a rise in the Islamic extremism in Nigeria and the rest of Africa. “Dissatisfied by results of the past and the failure of post-colonial African states to provide adequate solutions to the socio-economic and political problems, many people were looking for an alternative ideology of governance” (74). Groups promoting Islamic fundamentalism have become the viable alternative.

Boko Haram has its roots in a similar movement in the early 1980s known as Maitatsine. Both groups promote a philosophy that rejects Western civilization and favour strict enforcement of sharia law, objectives that include replacing the secular state with Islamic law, and a base of recruitment composed of young men who see themselves as politically and economically marginalized (Adesoji 2011). Both Adesoji and Onuoha (2010) highlight the failure of the Nigerian government to undress underlying issues including widespread corruption, poverty, unemployment, and political exclusion. The group itself is composed of a wide swath of society including academics, students, bankers and even government officials, however, the largest portion of its membership is formed from the ranks of the poor, unemployed, and undereducated (Adesoji 2010).

**Gaps in the Literature**

While the existing literature on youth violence in Nigeria provides a general understanding of the economic, political, security, and social factors that contribute to youth involvement in violent groups, there are areas where a greater understanding is needed, especially in the context of the Niger Delta and the rise of Boko Haram. First, there is little published information on the direct recruitment practices of violent groups. Second, there is a lack of understanding of the interlinkages between criminal gangs, university cults, and militant groups and how participation in one group could lead to participation in another, perhaps more violent group. Also, the literature focuses almost entirely on the participation of young men. Very little attention has been paid to the ways in which children are involved in armed groups including studies of what factors make children most vulnerable to recruitment. Even less information is available on the involvement of young and women and girls with these groups. Furthermore, much of the literature focuses on youth as a disaffected group. Little work has been
done to identify what leads individuals to join or not join such groups. Finally, there is little work on “what works” in deterring participation, either by keeping young people out of groups or in removing them and rehabilitating them after their participation.
III. Methodology

The Terms of Reference for this project were very precise. The project required the research team to:

- Complete a desk review of existing documents regarding children and armed conflict and violence in Nigeria.
- Identify gatekeepers in affected communities, through human rights and community development groups, and with help of gatekeepers identify different categories of stakeholders for field data collection and design the field data collection plan.
- Develop rapport with the above stakeholders and conduct field data collection—observations, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions—in four conflict-affected states, two in the South and two in the North. Focus on individual in-depth interviews through which more detailed information about individual respondents can be obtained.

A) Scope and Focus

This research used qualitative methods. It was conducted in four conflict-prone communities in two selected states in North and South of the country, selected in collaboration with the UNICEF Child Protection team. The final communities selected were Jos and Bauchi in the North and Port Harcourt and Warri in the South.
B) Stakeholder Participation

The study sought to engage organizations that report cases and that interact with children affected by armed conflict (children associated with armed groups in particular), families, community leaders, faith-based organizations, youth groups, health care providers, teachers, small business owners, I/NGOs, diplomats, national and international journalists, and government agencies and ministries.

The interactions aimed at:

- Obtaining existing information and data on children association with violence
• Identifying entry points to get access to key informants including children association with armed forces or armed groups (CAAFAG), armed groups leaders, proxies and supporters
• Mapping out the existing preventive measures
• Identifying initiatives that could be supported and expanded by UNICEF and its partners.

C) Orientation to Research

Local researchers were recruited to represent diversity of experience and expertise in local knowledge and context in the chosen geographical areas. The six-person team included men and women, Christian and Muslim, from the North and the South. (Short Team Biographies are included in Appendix D.)
The research was designed to be collaborative from the outset. The whole team met in Abuja for an orientation workshop, held from 24 to 30 November 2011. Topics addressed at the workshop include:

- Review of the Terms of Reference, desk review, proposed methodology
- Ethics in research, especially with conflict affected children
- Determining potential respondents and interview questions
- Practicing semi-structured interviews and group critique
- How to Conduct Focus Group Discussions, Focus Group questions
- Strategies for teamwork, logistics.
Together the research team combed over the Terms of Reference for the research and focused on the five main questions:

1. Different ways that children are being used by armed groups/gangs/cults.
2. Socio-economic characteristics and issues concerning children being used by armed groups/gangs/cults.
3. Ways different protection concerns and risks compound the situation of CAAC.
4. Identification of situations in which children are most at risk of being associated with armed groups/gangs/cults.
5. Assess presence and capacity of current child protection structures.

The team discussed what we thought we would find, based on our personal experience, and used that to start thinking about where to find a wider range of data. The group selected six classes of respondent to interview in each location: members of armed groups, children, government representatives (including police), non-state actors (NGO workers, e.g.), community leaders (ministers, imams, women’s leaders, headmasters, etc.), and other average adults. The goal was to interview five from each class in each location, for a total of thirty interviews in each city and a grand total of 120 interviews altogether. This strategy could be described as non-probabilistic, purposive sampling (Berg 2009, 50). The list of interview subjects is in Appendix A. With the help of lists of child protection network members from UNICEF, the team brainstormed ideas for whom we should interview, and what interview questions would be appropriate for each different class of respondent. The list of interview questions we finalized is in Appendix B. A similar process was used to determine Focus Group Discussion (FGD) classes and questions (See Berg 2009, Chapter 5). The team carried out four Focus Group Discussions in each of the four locations for the total of 16 FGDs.

The team spent a good amount of time going over the Typology of Armed Groups, presented in the literature review above, to see if the typology made sense to the researchers. That typology ended up structuring our thinking about the issue as we tried to define exactly what we were looking for. We also spent a fair amount of time discussing our definitions of children and youth, and how those definitions might vary across respondent class.
D) Fieldwork

We split into two teams, three people in the North and three people in the South, and set out to collect the target number of interviews and focus groups discussions. The teams met together every evening to debrief about the day’s activities and plan a strategy for the following day. Interviews were generally conducted by two researchers, one asking the questions and the other recording the responses. In addition to the suggested stakeholders suggested by UNICEF, the team members drew on their own networks of colleagues and acquaintances to locate interview subjects.

*Figure 4: Sarah and Lantana interviewing a Mallam about Almajiris*
The teams took a break over the December holiday, and reconvened in January to finish data collection at the next location.\(^1\) At that time, there was a national strike, but the teams were somehow still able to complete the project. Throughout the exercise, field researchers e-mailed completed interview response forms and FGD response forms to the lead researcher in Washington DC. She and her assistants collated the interview and FGD responses, and placed the data into a large spreadsheet for ease of analysis. The spreadsheets were bound and brought to Abuja for use in the analysis session.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Timeline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desk Review (Washington DC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hiring local researchers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orientation, research design (Abuja)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two weeks fieldwork (Bauchi, Port Harcourt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HOLIDAY BREAK</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two weeks fieldwork (Jos, Warri)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis (Abuja)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of Preliminary Findings (Abuja)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drafting of Final Report (Washington DC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Project Timeline**

E) Analysis Session

The whole team reconvened in Abuja for a group data analysis session (See Cresswell 2007, Chapter 8; Berg 2009, Chapter 11). We shared experiences of fieldwork, coded the interview and FGD transcripts for certain themes related to the five central questions (e.g. gender), and systematically grouped the responses. It was especially useful to have the two groups cross-check each other’s work. At the end of two days, the preliminary findings were put together and presented to UNICEF officials and other stakeholders in Abuja.

\(^1\) Unfortunately, due to the disturbances caused by the strike action, Ngolo Katta was not able to travel from Sierra Leone to rejoin the group for the second half of the exercise or the data analysis session.
F) Limitations

It is important to realize that this research was not initially conceived to be quantitative or geographically representative, so we cannot conclude anything about the scope of the problem, either the total number of children affected or the geographical range throughout Nigeria. This kind of exploratory qualitative research projects is appropriate in cases where very little is known about the nature or scope of the phenomenon under study. We make recommendations for further research in the recommendations section.

Data collection occurred over two, two-week periods and did not allow for longer-term connections to be fostered. Part of the period of data collection was during a National Strike and this made logistics extremely difficult. (One member of the research team was not able to join us for the second leg of the research.)

When we presented the preliminary results of the research to a group of high-level stakeholders in Abuja in January 2012, one of the questions we asked them was, “what had you expected to hear in this report that you did not?” Some of those expectations simply could not be met by the research as designed and will be addressed in the recommendations section under suggestions for future research. In particular, some asked about the dynamics as children grow older and are involved with armed groups over many years. Clearly, this study could only provide a snapshot view, and some anecdotal evidence about children’s participation over time. Others hoped to hear more about these dynamics in the rural areas of Nigeria. However, the decision was made to focus our limited resources on four relatively urban areas. Most of all, people wanted to know how widespread the phenomenon of children associated with armed groups is in Nigeria. Unfortunately, this methodology does not allow us to estimate the size of the population. The use of “snowball” sampling to find people to interview is common, especially when researching illicit activities, but it does make it impossible to extrapolate statistically.
IV. Findings

The first and most important thing we were able to do is establish the presence of children in armed groups. This alone is an achievement as this fact was a surprise to some of our respondents, and even to some of our research team.

Beyond that, we present the complete findings of the research, addressing the various questions posed in the Terms of Reference. We first address the conventional wisdom on the participation of children and young people in armed groups in Nigeria. We then complicate that standard narrative with more nuance by using our data to compare the experiences of children and young people across type of armed group, by region, and by gender. We detail the pathways between types of group and types of participation, as well as common paths into and out of participation. We investigate the participation of children and young people in armed groups with respect to other child protection concerns, detail possible “entry points” for child protection programming, and describe the existing child protection infrastructure as related to us by our respondents.

A) The Standard Story vs. Nuanced Version

Most respondents were clearly aware of the existence of armed groups in their areas, although the exact term “armed group” was not always accepted. In Jos, the belief was that there were no organized armed groups, and that children merely got “swept up” in violence during a crisis based on their community’s religious affiliation. In the Niger Delta, researchers sometimes had to use the term “freedom fighters.” Some claimed that children and young people were not involved in armed groups at all.

Most of those who agreed that children were involved in violence had a standard story to tell about that involvement: these children come from broken homes, they may be living on the street, they are forced by poverty, sent by their own parents, or run away from home. They are easy targets for unscrupulous adults who recruit them into violent behavior through promises of financial reward or through drugs. They generally play a supporting role, and are not too heavily involved in the violence. For girls, the story is similar, with the addition that they may be
recruited by their boyfriends. The end result of this moral failing is that they end up as drug users and prostitutes.

At our first orientation session with the research team, we talked about their expectations for the research, and this Standard Story was detailed by them even then. We later confirmed and refined it through research. At the analysis session at the end, we detailed further elements of the standard story.

The stereotype of children and young people involved with armed groups is that they are:
- From poor parental backgrounds
- School-dropouts
- Unemployed, or not economically engaged
- Involved in street hawking.

In the North, Almajiris (Koranic school pupils) are understood to be the biggest recruiting ground, and in the South it is groups of street kids and hawkers from poor family backgrounds who have lost parental care. Many claim that if government provided better access to education for children and employment for youths, this problem would disappear.

But in our research, there was plenty of blame to go around. Another of the commonly suggested causes of children and young people involved in armed groups was overpopulation or uncontrolled procreation (too many children). Respondents told us that some parents cannot cater for all their children. One respondent in Bauchi (in the North) told us that once a boy is an adolescent (14-15), he will have an outward facing room, and the family will not know his behavior. Another respondent in Warri (in the South) told us the problem arose from men having too many children to care for, or having children with different women. Some said that the armed groups are mostly made up of people who moved to urban areas from the rural communities, since there were no schools there and nothing else going on.

The standard story points to the failures of adults, either bad parenting or the failures of the school system or the economy or other service provision.
Interestingly, the Standard Story varied somewhat depending on whom we talked to. Recall that we included six respondent classes among our interview subjects. First, even the distinction between children and youth varied depending on the respondent class. While government and NGO officials generally used the “straight 18” definition, there was some slippage. One police officer talked about juvenile justice being for offenders under 18, but simultaneously noted that if someone was under police custody, then they must be involved in criminal activity, and therefore no longer a child. Average adults, community leaders, and children themselves seemed to draw the line around twelve or thirteen, with participation in adult activities as the real marker. Members of armed groups also defined childhood as up to primary school age, but beyond that everyone is a youth. As for the standard story of children’s initial involvement and subsequent participation, there was also interesting variation by respondent class. Children and youth said they were involved for money and a sense of belonging, or because they believed in the cause. Other adults, including community leaders, NGO and government representatives, saw less agency among the children and pointed to poverty, lack of jobs or education, indoctrination or the influence of politicians. Average adults seemed more likely to admit that children were involved than did people of some authority. Most interesting, the representatives of armed groups tended to say that children were curious about their activities, and joined of their own accord, but that they did not participate in violence.

In many ways the Standard Story is correct and describes the situation of some children associated with armed groups. However, this research allowed us to go deeper and understand a range of possible stories giving a more nuanced version of children’s pathways into and out of participation in armed groups. And this is where the scholarship on child soldiering is useful. Over the past few decades, researchers have gone beyond a Standard Story of child soldiers, abducted by rebel groups and forced to fight against their will, to include a range possible pathways into participation, activities engaged in, and pathways out of participation. As with child soldiers elsewhere, we found that children and young people associated with armed groups in Nigeria are sometimes forced. But they also sometimes decide to join armed groups themselves. They sometimes do so for protection, or a sense of belonging or even fun.
The key point is that, as with child soldiers, adults see children primarily as victims. But if we start from the children’s own perspective, we may be able to more clearly understand their choices, and hence find more effective entry points for child protection programming.

**B) Variation by Type of Armed Groups**

The research revealed different patterns of participation by type of armed group. We will use the typology of armed groups introduced in the literature review (ethnic/religious militias, vigilante groups, gangs/thugs, cults) as an organizing framework, in order to facilitate the presentation of the results. The review of the literature included a broader description of each of the types of group, but what was missing there was a focus on children related to each type. Here, for each type, we discuss findings related to children’s recruitment, participation, and pathways out of participation.

1. **Ethnic/Religious Militias**

Recall that Militias’ “aims are to redress grievances and injustices and protect and defend the rights of the ethnic or religious group” (Hazen and Homer, 73).

**Examples of Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boko Haram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic and religious militias in Jos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oodua People’s Congress (OPC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recruitment of Children**

There is a distinction between the primarily ethnic militias of the South and the primarily religious militias of the North. The ethnic militias of the South are mainly political groups, fighting for their perceived share of the nation’s oil wealth (e.g. NDPVF, MEND, MOSOP). The

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2 We will have more to say about the flexibility of the framework, and in particular, how groups might change their typology over time, and how children and youth move from one type of group to another.
majority of their members join voluntarily, out of identification with the political cause. Members usually receive an “orientation” or a kind of political education or indoctrination. Children from the oil producing communities are more likely to join.

Religious militias are more common in the North. Recruitment often happens through places of worship, either mosques or churches. Almajiris or Koranic Schools are often targeted. The children associated with the Almajiri system are often sent into the streets to beg, and that can make them more susceptible to recruitment. They are often desperate for food or money, so more easily lured. They may also be indoctrinated by their religious leaders. One respondent told us, “Most of them are indoctrinated to see the other religion as the enemy. They make children to see people of other faiths as enemies.” In addition, since they are already organized into groups, it may be easier to recruit them en masse than it would be to recruit the same number of individual street kids.

**Almajiris**
A common practice among poor families in Northern Nigeria is to send young boys to Islamic boarding schools to receive Koranic studies. Entrusted to the care of an Islamic teacher or Mallam, the boys, called *almajiris*, must financially support themselves by begging for alms, committing petty crime, or seeking jobs as laborers.
Almajiris are particularly vulnerable to becoming swept up in the periodic religious rioting that occurs in Northern cities such as the 2000 Kaduna riots, the inter-religious violence in Jos, and the riots following the April 2011 presidential elections. During these episodes of violence, almajiris are said to have, under the influence of their Islamic teachers and politicians, participated in large numbers in some of the most heinous violence. Through the course of the research in Jos and Bauchi, almajiris were commonly referenced as the children most likely to be involved in violence and in need of greatest increase in protection. While some interview subjects believed that almajiris become involved in violence out of the need to earn money to survive, others indicated that the type of religious education propagated by the Mallams makes it easy rile up religious fervor amongst the children. As almajiris are mostly illiterate and lack employable skills, when they become adults, the likelihood that they will continue to be involved in violence and criminal activities remain high. Many of the subjects interviewed said that the system is in urgent need or reform.

Children’s Participation

Children play a range of roles for these groups. They may serve in support roles, like messengers, transporters, informants or spies. They may do praise singing to keep up the spirits of fellow combatants. In a tense setting, they may be called upon to start the violence by
throwing stones. They may be active participants in violence by inciting it or even by following along after adults as “finishers” killing off the wounded. An emergency response worker who had witness eruptions of violence in Jos said, “The children below 7 and above are termed ‘finishers.’ The finishers are armed with clubs, 2 by 2’s, daggers and other small arms. Their job is to follow up on people who were felled during the violence, but not yet dead to finish them up and make sure they are dead. They are like scavengers.” They may also be involved in other violent activities related to conflict, such as looting or rape. There were even accounts of children being forced to kill. One former commander of a militant group interviewed in Warri disclosed, “‘Sometimes we tie people down and ask the children to shoot them.”

**Awaiting My Turn…** by Sarah Bendu

I sit down in the crowd of children and youths who are my peers on this cool Saturday morning listening to the organisers of the meeting, YARAC, an acronym for Young Adolescents Reflection and Action Centre, with the theme ‘shun violence and embrace peace for a better tomorrow’, I can’t help but smile cynically at the comments of the commentator…. He says ‘let the past be past, forgive, don’t hate’ ‘we are all one let’s not allow religion to divide us as the politicians have already been using religion as a tool’. Hmmm…. If only he knew….if only he was there when it all happened!

My name is David Musa I turned 18 a few months ago. I was born here and grew up in this once so peaceful town. Today, my town has become a shadow of its peaceful self with the re-occurring crisis which has led to the loss of lives and property of many in the hands of young children and youths alike. I remember like yesterday that evening 3 years ago after the Local Government Elections, when my perception changed on ‘forgive and forget’ and ‘vengeance is mine……’ my community was attacked by young boys between the age of 15-21 and high on drugs from the other religious divide. They came yielding dangerous weapons (machetes, knives, fuel, etc.) and causing havoc to my community. Many were slain and houses set on fire. My father was slain like a chicken while trying to protect my two sisters and my mum. My mother and two sisters were raped in turns in my very presence by this group of youths, while a machete was held to my head rendering me useless. They disregarded the pleas and cries from my mother and sisters. After they finished they pounced on me beating me up so badly, leaving me for dead in my pool of blood.

Sadly I survived, but something inside of me died that day, I swore someday, I’ll have my revenge on the group of youths that attacked us and their entire religious group. I’m awaiting my turn no matter how long it takes I’ll have my revenge. I recall their faces and we’ll meet again someday… Yet YARAC stands here telling me to ‘let the past be past, forgive don’t hate’ what a joke. I didn’t know when a laugh slipped through my lips and the speaker looked at me asking what I had in mind for my laugh and if I cared to share. I looked him in the eye and nodded my head side to side, I took a deep breath and told him he could say all he wanted to say, because it’s his job to preach peace, my reality remains the same, and there’s nothing he’ll say to change it. I’ll have my revenge someday, I only await my turn.
Pathways Out

How do children and young people leave these armed groups? Our interviewers uncovered a range of possible trajectories out of participation. There was some debate among our researchers about whether, once involved, children could leave voluntarily. Some might leave because they lose faith in the cause, or because of peer group pressure. We certainly documented cases where civil society engagement, or influence from religious groups of respected community leaders helped young people disengage from violent groups. In addition, sometimes it was leaders of these groups themselves who insisted that young people leave and go back to school, some going as far as paying school fees for former members. For example, one former militant interviewed in Warri said that Tompolo, one of the commanders of MEND, paid school fees for boys living in militant camps and in communities in the oil producing areas. In the South, the Amnesty Program also played a role.

2. Vigilante Groups

Recall that the purpose of vigilante groups is to “Provide security to communities; provide law and order services in areas where police presence is minimal; provide economic opportunities for members” (Hazen and Homer 73).

Examples of Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operation Rainbow</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bakassi Boys</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oodua People’s Congress (OPC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meinbutu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Vigilante Groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recruitment of Children

Generally, children and youth who become involved with vigilante groups do so voluntarily to protect their community. As these groups are given legitimacy by the community because they are composed of highly respected members of the community, the youth also tend to be upstanding and are not as likely to be involved with petty crime or other activities generally
associated with young people involved in other armed groups. It is also generally the case that
unregistered or informal vigilante groups – as opposed to groups that are recognized as the
“official” protection or community policing force of the community – are more likely to involve
children under the age of eighteen.

**Participation of Children**

Children involved with vigilante groups often are used as informants or man checkpoints
into and out of the community. One subject in Warri said that children are used at checkpoints
on the area’s waterways, taking tolls of drinks and cigarettes from those wishing to pass through.

**Pathways Out**

As membership in vigilante groups is mostly voluntary, children are able to leave
whenever they choose. Often, the group itself disbands at the end of a particular crisis or when
the security situation improves. Other times, the children join the police or military when they
come of age. There are also instances when children, looking for better incentives or pay, will
become involved with an ethnic militia or other armed group.

3. **Gangs/Thugs**

Unlike the other armed groups in the typology, gangs and thugs typically operate solely
for economic gain rather than a unifying political, ethnic, security, or religious motivation
(Hazen and Homer 2007). They are often supported by or report to politicians and are often
referred to as the “youth wing” of their political party.

**Examples of Groups: (groups we discovered through research are in italics)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area Boys</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yandaba</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECOMOG</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarasuka Boys <em>(Winti Boys, Waju Boys, 3 Spartans, 300 Spartacus, Kwaila, Iraqi Kwana Yaki, Kimba Boys, Matawalle Boys, Kowa Soldiers)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yankalare</td>
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</table>
Children and Armed Conflict in the Niger Delta and Northern Region of Nigeria – July 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Robbery/pickpocket gangs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agaba</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTU thugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalakatu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bakasu Boys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recruitment of Children**

When recruiting children, these groups generally target those that are seen as strong and intelligent, but also lack adequate parental care or supervision, making them easy targets to be lured with the promise of quick money and a source of livelihood. While some join voluntarily, some children are forced into involvement or join out of necessity. The groups often are in control of a certain territory, making it essential that children in these areas join the groups for protection or to avoid being on the receiving end of their violent activities. It is also common that children join under the influence of friends or siblings who are members of the gang. Compared to other types of armed groups, gangs are more likely to include females either as members or as “girlfriends” to members.

**Participation of Children**

Children within gangs are used in the day-to-day criminal activities of the gang or groups of thugs. They are used as pickpockets and participate in extortion, intimidation, and armed robbery. In particular, they are used during robberies to access confined spaces too small for older members. Children are also involved in the conflicts between competing gangs. They participate in fights with other gangs and are often the ones sent to incite the violence.

In Bauchi, children in these gangs, particularly the Sarasuka boys, were commonly connected with electoral crimes, including ballot box snatching, intimidation, and stirring up violence at political rallies.

**Pathways Out**

There are a number of different exit points for children involved with gangs. Sometimes, their involvement can lead to recognition by the politician or boss that controls the gang, which
could lead to a political appointment or a legitimate paid employment. Children also find themselves a way out by finding viable alternatives to involvement with these groups either through other employment, government or civil society programs, or returning to schools. Others find help from peer groups or influential members of the community. A female secondary student in Bauchi explained how another female classmate who was associated with an armed group chose to leave the group after her fellow classmates shunned her. As soon as she quit the group, she was allowed into the friend group. Vigilante groups have also been instrumental in preventing gang activities and assisting young people in disassociating from gangs, sometimes allowing them to join the vigilante group as an alternative. A member of a vigilante group in Bauchi explained how his group keeps close ties with children and youth involved in gangs or other armed groups. Sometimes they play a role in arresting and handing them over to police. If a member wants to renounce his involvement, the vigilante group members will help him disarm and rehabilitate. If the child or youth goes back to the armed group, he indicated that the vigilante group will seek them out for punishment.

It can also be incredibly difficult for children to leave gangs. They may be prevented with threats of violence or be forced to pay exorbitant fees. For some, the only way out is to move away from the area and beyond the reach of the gang.

4. Cults
Like gangs, cults operate in order to provide economic gain for their members. However, they also tend to be more organized around defending a certain territory – often in defense of a neighborhood or ethnic group within an urban area – than are gangs. They also involve more rules and rituals and are more strongly organized than are gangs or groups of thugs. Cults are generally located in the larger cities of the South. They are also present in the university system where they evolved from confraternities and may be loosely affiliated to outside cults or across different universities.

Also, there are some indications that the cults may be affiliated or feed into ethnic militias or even the police force (see more in the section below on pathways between different types of armed group).
Examples of Groups: (groups in italics are new groups we discovered through the research)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Niger Delta Vigilante Service (NDVS)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Icelanders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greenlanders</td>
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<td>Deebam</td>
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<td>Deewell</td>
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<td>KKK</td>
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<td>Out Laws</td>
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<td>Black Axes</td>
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<td>Conquer Marine</td>
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<td>R Baggers</td>
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<td>Jammers</td>
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<td>Vikings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jungle Boys</td>
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<td>IJ Boys</td>
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<td>Adaeze</td>
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<td>Ampiclox</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virus</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Female Cults</strong> - White Bras, Girls Girls, Purple Pearls, Black Angels, Buccaneers, Green Queens, White Queens, EIYE, Daughters of Jezebel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recruitment of Children**

Children of any age can be pulled into cults. They can join voluntarily or under the influence of peers or siblings. One boy in Port Harcourt said, “I joined a group known as Jungle Boys when I first came here because of oppression and pressure from the people I associated with.” They may also be forced into membership. As cults often control entire neighborhoods (“territorial integrity”), children may be forced to be a member of the cult in order for them to play or sell goods in the area. The researchers in Port Harcourt were told that one cult controls a football field. If children want to play on the field they must be members of the cult or have permission of the cult leaders. Often cults target the most vulnerable, particularly street children, those in need of livelihoods and/or lack adequate parental care. Often the children see themselves as
having no other option but to join a cult. One young cult member said, “We flyover boys, no school. So we join cult to survive.”

Membership in a cult also affords children added protection. One young cult member in Warri said, “If you beat up a child in a cult group, you would be attacked by senior cult members, beaten and robbed. If you are not a member of a cult group in some communities and you are caught stealing, you will be dealt with severely but could be protected if you are in a cult group.” He himself had been forcibly recruited into the Greenlanders cult after seeking the group’s help to retrieve a stolen cellphone. “After recovering the phone from the thief forcefully, they kidnapped myself and the thief and initiated us into their cult groups with threats of killing us if we tell anyone about it,” he said. Even in street hawking, children must join the cult groups to sell in a certain area. And the children do not tell their parents about it.

Cults also target the children of the wealthy, as they provide added resources and connections for the group. This is particularly true for university cults, but is also the case in urban cults.

Initiation into cults usually involves elaborate and often violent rituals. Initiates are blindfolded, take an oath, receive symbolic cuts or markings, and sometimes pay a large initiation fee. Rituals can include withstanding a beating from fists or machetes by other members or gang rape for females.

**Participation of Children**

Children act as the foot soldiers of cults, involved in the group’s daily activities. They carry arms and are involved with fighting with other groups, rapes, and killings. Children are commonly used in the transport and trade of drugs and are users themselves. They also are involved in spying and are commonly used to trail people of interest to the cult. Since cult leaders gain strength and respect based on the number of children they have under them, children are often the first line for recruiting other children into the group’s ranks. Children can move up the ranks of the group based on the number of people they recruit and how successfully they carry out their assigned activities.
My name is Jesse Eyo, I am 11yrs old and I come from Akwa Ibom State in the Southern part of Nigeria where I lived with my mom until I was 9, I have never met my father although my mom told me he was still alive even if she never said much about him, I asked her severally why he never came to visit us but she always had a way of dismissing my question each time. I have never been to school because for as long as I can remember I have been helping my mom sell plantain chips and groundnut on the streets around the slum where we lived and sometimes I even go far away to make sure I sell off all the items I leave the house with. I see other children go to school and most times wish my mother could afford sending me to school, I remember the last time I asked, she told me I had to work harder to make enough money for our upkeep and my education… How was that possible? I kept on working, hawking on the streets everyday even on Sundays when others went to church but all my efforts did not quite solve our poverty situation. I thought my mom was lazy and wicked because all she did was sit at home while I was always on the street, one day after hustling till it was almost dark, I came back home and met my mom very ill, I was confused and did not know what to do, the sickness turned out to be something we could not afford to deal with due to our financial situation so she died after four days.

After the death of my mom, I came down to Port Harcourt to live with an aunt my mom always talked about but after several weeks with her, I decided I should be on my own since she did not have enough to take care of her four children plus myself, I left her house without her notice because she would have tried to stop me. My first night alone outside was terrible as I slept on a hard cold floor and woke up with an excruciating pain all over my body the next morning. Although I had been on the streets for a long time, PH was a new territory and I had this shiver down my spine when I thought of ways I could survive on my own.

On my third day on the streets of Port Harcourt around Waterlines Bus stop, I met Kelechi, Kelechi was 10 years old, was also homeless like me but from his story he had been on the streets for four years on his own, I wanted to be his friend because he looked like someone I could trust, Kelechi liked me and also wanted me to be his friend but he told me there was someone I had to meet if we must be seen together, he took me to an older guy who sold handkerchief to motorists by the roadside, the older guy asked me a few questions and told me I would have to bring to him some percentage of my earnings if I must hustle around that area, I agreed since I felt I had no choice and besides Kelechi earlier told me to accept any condition given to me.

After several weeks trying to survive around Waterlines, myself and Kelechi had grown so used to each other that we did and shared everything together, the days I don’t make enough money for food, Kelechi would share his with me and I did the same for him. Things were so bad for us that we could barely afford food for ourselves, for us clothes were luxuries and of course our shelter was an abandoned building close to the Waterlines main park.

I woke up one morning and could not find Kelechi, searched everywhere and asked questions but no one seemed to have noticed him that day, Kelechi later showed up at about 2:35pm with the sum of N2000 in his pocket, that was a lot of money for us and I asked him where he got it from, Kelechi told me it didn’t matter and then gave me half of the money which was N1000.
happy when I collected the money because I knew it would solve my feeding problems for days but I noticed Kelechi had been unusually quite since he came back with the money. All my efforts to make him tell me anything was abortive so I let him be, two days later Kelechi woke up with a very serious illness, I could not say what the problem was, none of the other boys around could also help. I ran to the nearest drug store and I bought Paracetamol for him but that did not help as Kelechi’s skin color turned blue before it was evening, I was so confused and asked him what he thought was wrong with him.

I cried when Kelechi told me that because he could not stay in hungry anymore and could not also see me suffer, he had donated some of his blood for the money he came back with the other day, somehow someone had collected some blood from his body and gave him N2000. I didn’t know what to do or who to run to, I just sat by Kelechi’s side and watched him till I slept off…. When I woke up the next morning, myself and the other boys around found Kelechi dead at the corner of the abandoned building we stayed. We were so afraid that the only thing we could think of was to wrap Kelechi’s body in a cloth and we dumped the body at a nearby swamp.

**Pathways Out**

Cults are especially difficult for children to leave. As cults control entire neighborhoods, it is likely that a child would have to leave the area entirely if not voluntarily allowed to leave the cult’s ranks. In some cults, it is possible to pay your way out. One group requires those wishing to leave to pay a fee of N5000 and a bottle of Chelsea (a popular drink). Sometimes children find their way out of a cult when the group or unit is dissolved by a senior member.

5. **Pathways between types of groups**

One might ask the question, beyond the purely child protection concerns, why should we care about a few child pickpockets? Or a few boys throwing stones during a riot? This is where we come back to the linkage between child protection and security concerns. We have evidence that these children move into more violent acts as they age, and move between different types of armed groups. The street hawker cult member today may more easily be recruited into the criminal gang tomorrow. The boy at the vigilantes’ checkpoint today may lead the ethno-religious violence tomorrow.

It was reported that recruiters often target children and young people who are already members of cults, and therefore familiar with violence. For example, one militant that researchers spoke with in Port Harcourt described how his membership in a cult at a young age
led to his later involvement with the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta. He said, “I started armed activities as member of a cult group in the street and later went into the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, MEND. Most of us started cult activities as early as 10 years because the street cults in some areas are like associations/clubs.” A community leader in Port Harcourt further explained,

Most of the armed groups in Rivers state started in Okrika. They started as a standby community army who were used to fight inter-communal wars. They later started to align with different interest groups in the community to fight over chieftaincy titles. This led to the formation of groups within the standby community army. Over time, politicians started to sponsor their activities and the groups created an identity for themselves and became known as cults from the initial ethnic militia groups. Even among the different groups, those that share a common ideology started to form further groups. This led to the proliferation of the cult/armed activities in the state and the consequent recruitment of children.

It is not always clear how armed groups interact and whether there is cross recruitment between them. There seem to be more connections between groups in Port Harcourt, whereas in Warri, those involved in armed groups told researchers that the entities were entirely separate. Militants interviewed there even expressed a negative perception of those involved in cults.

Although many respondents in Jos say there are no organized armed groups in existence, in Bauchi, people commented on links between Sarasuka, politicians, and drug cartels. One non-state actor said, “There is a sustained drug (Marijuana) cartel existing in the state which is being patronized by the political elites to help promote the use of children/youth in armed conflict. There is high-level state security complicity in the trade which is done openly in communities by armed and or community youth gang leaders.” Another adult in Bauchi claimed that, “political leaders lure children with drugs, money, arms and promises of better opportunities but abandon them when elections are over. These armed youth later turn on the communities with criminal activities.”
Of course, we need more long-term research on the pathways between types of groups, and on children’s careers of increasing participation of violence over time. This research can only provide anecdotal evidence. But this is why people interested in security in Nigeria should be interested in this research, because people who have participated in armed groups as children may be more likely to participate in armed groups as adults.

C) Variation by Region

Despite important similarities, there are distinct types of groups, distinct participation patterns, distinct protection issues in the North and the South.

In the previous section we described the variations in children’s recruitment, participation, and exit from armed groups, differentiated according to the typology of armed groups introduced earlier. In this section, the goal is to describe differences in children’s recruitment, participation, and exit from armed groups by region. Some of this will be accomplished by describing which types of armed group are prevalent in which region, and extrapolating from the previous discussion of variation by type of armed group.

During the data analysis session with teams from the North and the South, we discussed the differences between the two contexts (recall that “North” in this instance really means Jos and Bauchi and “South” means Port Harcourt and Warri.) Although there were occasional debates between the Northerners and the Southerners about fact versus stereotype, we were able to agree about some conclusions regarding variation by region.

The types of armed groups by region

In the North, the groups are less defined. Gangs and militias are really just people who get swept up in a chaotic period or crisis. In the North, cult groups are non-existent, but vigilantes are very strong. Even within the north there is difference. The main factors in Bauchi were political, whereas in Jos they were ethno-religious.

In the South, there is more structure, hierarchy, etc. In the South, religious difference is not so exploited by politicians.
In both places, children may become involved at a very young age. In the North, children as young as seven may play an active role (as “finishers” for example). Children may begin as Almajiris as young as five. In the South it was reported that cult group membership can start as young as eight, and militant group membership starting at twelve.

With respect to patterns of recruitment, we found that in the South, recruitment is high during the payment of amnesty benefits. In the North, recruitment spikes during holidays, Fridays and Sundays, and during political activities. Since cults are not really present in the North, there is no initiation process. In the North cults are seen as something diabolical. There may be some secret cults, but they are not as pronounced as in the South.

There was an interesting difference reported with respect to stealing from shops. In the North, children boldly pick up items in stores without paying for them, in broad daylight. In the South if they want to do “rasking” they go on a rampage as a group. They do not do it with the pretext of buying something. They rather loot. In the north, they just walk in and take what they want and refuse to pay.

There is a culture of children begging in the street in the North, but there are no cases of street begging in the South. They will extort, but not beg. It was reported that every member of the Jungle Boys cult in the south is homeless. In the North, Almajiri children stay with their Mallam and child members of street gangs have homes and stay with their parents.

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3 But Sarah notes that even within the North there is variation. In Bauchi the militias are more politically based and in Jos more ethno-religious.
What are the benefits of participation in armed groups for children?

The most common benefits mentioned across groups were protection, livelihood, status, and a sense of belonging. In some cases, it was reported that participation can bring more than bare livelihood, it can bring extraordinary wealth.

In the North, politicians give motorcycles to armed groups and key leaders of the groups were even able to get a car. One 22 year old was given a car, but was unable to keep it. We found that in the South, there are more children from wealthy homes involved. For them, the incentive is protection, to be free from harassment from these groups. They can freely go to parties or go out to clubs without fear. The parents of the wealthy ones help get them out of prison if they are arrested. In the North, it is the politicians who get people out of jail.

The children and young people in gangs know that they are being used, but feel they do not have better options. They acknowledge that the gains are all short-term gains. Even if they stop participation for a time, when election time comes around, they cannot resist the benefits.

D) Gender

As has been noted in the literature on girl soldiers (McKay and Mazurana 2004, Coulter 2009), there is often disbelief that girls are really affiliated with armed groups. Indeed, many of our respondents were doubtful of girls’ involvement in armed groups in Nigeria. But by asking a range of people, we were able to gather evidence of girls’ recruitment and participation in armed groups. As for girl soldiers in other African contexts, their recruitment, participation and pathways out of participation are gendered.

Girls Recruitment

The standard story for girls is similar in many ways to that of boys, but it contains some important differences. The Standard Story is that girls, especially from broken homes, are lured into groups. People still point to bad parenting, and lack of educational or occupational opportunities as factors in girls’ recruitment, though some girls get involved to protect themselves or their families. The belief is that girls are often lured into armed groups by their
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boyfriends. They may also pressure boys to join armed groups. Indeed, one of the gender related findings is that some boys may join armed groups as a means of accessing girlfriends.

Girls are more likely to be the targets of sexual violence in armed groups. For example, while cult initiation for boys may involve a savage beating, it may involve rape for girls. It was reported that the Greenlander cult’s female branch, the Green Queens, are initiated through rape.

**Girls Participation**

Even more than boys, girls are understood primarily as victims. The Standard Story is that they play a strictly supporting role, often ending up as drug users and prostitutes. Girls and women are more likely to be involved in gangs than any of the other types of armed group. We heard that girls are used as messengers, as spies, or to transport arms or drugs. There is at least one example of a girl being used to detonate a bomb in a terrorist attack in the North. But there are also reports that girls sometimes assume leadership roles, and may even be more violent or brutal, at times, than their male compatriots. In addition to stone throwing and similar activities, we see women taking significant roles in the conflict in Jos (even using AK 47s). Our research team was surprised to learn that there are female-only cults (e.g. Girls Black Queens, Green Queens, Black Jezebels, Black Bras, White Bras).

In addition, some respondents told us that girls may be involved in instigating violent conflict in cases where rival gangs may clash over a girl. Finally, we were told that girls are sometimes sexually exploited by security forces if they are taken into custody.

**Pathways Out for Girls**

Girls also face gender specific barriers to exit from armed groups. Their boyfriends may pressure them to stay involved. We were told that girls get involved in drugs or prostitution, and then have a difficult time returning to “respectable” society. Some girls received assistance from religious or community groups to stop using drugs and take care of their small children. Although the Standard Story is that girls are lured into armed groups by boys or men, we found that girls sometimes pressured boys, schoolmates for example, to leave armed groups or gangs. We also found that girls were sometimes the ones who pressured boys to join gangs.
E) Child Protection Concerns

1. **Drugs**

   One theme that emerged during the research was the use of drugs as a means to lure children into armed groups, and once involved, as a way to ensure there continued participation. This was especially prevalent amongst gangs/thugs in the North. In Bauchi, the drugs commonly consumed by children include large quantities of cough syrup, marijuana/Indian hemp, cocaine, exol 5, and sniffing chemicals like petrol and glue. Those interviewed in Bauchi commonly attributed the political class with supplying drugs to children and youth as a way of controlling them and using them to commit criminal acts to cement their power. In Jos, many of those interviewed claimed that during religious riots many of the children committing acts of violence are high on drugs. In the South, drugs use amongst children came up less frequently in interviews, however, marijuana/Indian hemp and cocaine use were often associated with cults and militant groups. In both the North and the South, children were identified as being used for the transport and sale of drugs. In Bauchi, it was even reported that children bring drugs to school in their backpacks to sell to their classmates with the full knowledge of the teachers.

2. **Small Arms**

   In addition to drugs, children are used to transport arms, sometimes unknowingly, as they are less suspicious to security forces. They also have easy access to small arms. In both regions, weapons like knives, cutlasses, axes, broken bottles, and even bows and arrows (in the North) were identified as weapons commonly used by children, which they can easily obtain from local markets or fabricate themselves. Guns, however, are provided to them by politicians (in Bauchi), by militant groups or cults (in Port Harcourt and Warri), or by their own communities for the purpose of community protection (in Port Harcourt, Warri, and Jos). Those interviewed in the South said children as young as eight were using guns at the height of the militancy in the Niger Delta.

3. **Interaction with security forces**

   Police were implicated as being complicit in the activities of armed groups and ambivalent to the involvement of children. Some interviewed disclosed that it is common to see
police officers smoking drugs with cult and militant leaders. It is widely believed that security forces are actively engaged in the arms and drug trade orchestrated by armed groups. Further, one researcher was told that police officers were using children at checkpoints to take money from passing vehicles and that officers instructed children on how to use guns. While some interviewed identified collaboration between police and armed groups, equally discussed was a sense of distrust between the two groups.

The interviews also revealed that security forces sometimes target children as they are seen as vulnerable. However, this perceived vulnerability also feeds into why groups utilize children in their activities. If police arrests children, they are more likely to be released or turned over to their parents. In Bauchi, several people interviewed indicated that even if children or youth are arrested, they will almost certainly be released after politicians intervene on their behalf.

Children who commit crimes and are caught are commonly treated like adults by police and security forces and are housed in the same jail facilities.

In Bauchi, however, vigilante groups (who are considered by many to be community police) have proven more effective in curbing criminal activity and, as one respondent said, are more respected by children and youth.

4. HIV/AIDS, STDs, and Sexual Exploitation

Because of the lifestyle associated with involvement in armed groups, children who participate are also more likely to engage in earlier and riskier sexual behavior, exposing them to HIV/AIDS and STDs. Drug use was also identified as a way in which children are exposed to HIV/AIDS infection. Children involved in cults are also exposed to greater risk as initiation rituals often involved the transfer of blood, with the initiates either drinking blood or the same instrument is used to cut or mark each member.

Girls are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and STD exposure as victims of rape at the hands of armed groups or during initiation rituals. Interview subjects also described situations in
which young girls engage in unprotected sex with members of armed groups or security forces in order to gain protection.

**F) Service Availability and Gaps**

Through the course of the interviews, particularly with members of civil society and representatives of government ministries, it became apparent that some awareness of the issue of children’s involvement with armed groups already exists. CSOs and ministries have developed some programs that address the underlying child protection concerns associated with this issue.

Most government programs focus on skills training and employment for youth. One program provides youth with bikes or *keke napo* (a three-wheeled bike popular in the North) to create income-earning opportunities. There are even accounts in Bauchi of the governor handing out gifts of cars to youth to persuade them not to involve themselves with street gangs. In Warri and Port Harcourt, the federal government’s Niger Delta Amnesty Program, which provides skills training for youth that renounce militancy (including some under the age of 18), and various state-run skills acquisition and employment programs for young people have been initiated by the government and oil companies.

In Jos and Bauchi, many of the programs focus on developing conflict resolution skills and programs that encourage positive interaction between youth from the Muslim and Christian communities. Churches and community-based charity organizations in the South were actively involved in providing food, shelter, and engagement for street children and those most at risk of becoming involved in armed groups.

Among the challenges for both civil society groups and government ministries was a lack of funding and capacity to address the issue directly. There was also the sense the programming is made up of many distinct projects, not connected by an overall focus on the needs of vulnerable children and youth.

The Child Protection Network and other human rights networks were identified as having useful programs documenting human rights violations and the problems facing vulnerable children. However, many civil society members criticized the networks as often too focused on
documentation instead of intervention. Further, some expressed frustration at the lack of coordination between organizations, and that some groups become involved in the networks to gain prestige and resources and not to help children.

The general sense among most respondents was that government should provide the solutions.

Although government has some programs in place, vulnerable children and youth were often unaware of or unable to access services. For example, some street boys explained that although they know education is free, in their rural communities they were unable to travel to the distant primary school. As for service provision by other organs of the government, we found that security services (police and military) do not, in practice, differentiate between children and adults.

Although most believed government should bear the responsibility for child welfare, respondents could point to actions of individuals and small-scale civil society groups trying to fill the gap.

"Teach children their rights"

Joseph (name changed) is a boy living on the streets of Port Harcourt. Though not admitting his involvement in any, Joseph knows a lot about several of the cults that operate in the area called “flyover”.

One day, Joseph found himself at the scene of an armed robbery. He says he was trying to protect the victim, a young girl. The police arrive on the scene. Gunfire is exchanged. One of the armed robbers, a boy himself, is killed and Joseph is arrested.

After three weeks of sitting in prison, a man shows up and negotiates his release. The street boys in the area call this man “Mr. Human Rights.”

His real name is Justine Ijeoma and he works with the Human Rights, Social Development, and Environmental Foundation (HURSDEF). Justine and HURSDEF have been an active force in working with street kids, trying to keep them out of cults and finding members a way out. He also helps children, like Joseph, who find themselves caught up in the legal system.

However, he and his organization face many challenges. In addition, to difficulties in finding funding and hiring lawyers on behalf of detained children, HURSDEF staff have themselves been arrested by security forces while trying to help these children.

For Justine, one of the most important things that street children need is to know that they have rights. Not only do that have rights when they arrested by police, but they also have the right to go to school and a right to a better future.

As Joseph told the research team, “We are talented but nobody [is there] to feature us.”
Individuals like Justine and organizations like HURSDEF are working to change that. Despite the challenge they face, they are having small yet meaningful impacts in the lives of children like Joseph.

G) Entry Points

The Terms of Reference asked for “Identification of ‘entry points’ for possible interventions in terms of direct support to the affected children.” Recall that what we call “the standard story” tends to place the blame for children’s participation in armed groups on bad parenting or on the government. That standard story tends to yield standard recommendations for action: improve education, create more jobs for youth, and decrease poverty levels. We try to go beyond the standard recommendations and discuss, based on our research, some innovative ways one could attempt to keep children and youth out of armed groups, mitigate the harm they experience while they are in armed groups, attempt to draw them out of participation, and assist them in reintegration afterwards.

Different groups interviewed had very different responses to questions regarding the scale and reasons for children’s involvement in armed groups. Government officials from the relevant ministries and those from non-governmental or community organizations were generally aware of the issue, however, they admit that they lack sufficient knowledge and capacity to prevent children from becoming involved in armed groups and help find alternatives and exit points for those that are already involved. Community leaders and other adults generally underestimated the extent of the problem and tend to point to poor family situations and the wickedness of children as the cause for their restiveness and involvement in nefarious activities. So, clearly, depending on one’s perspective on children’s trajectories into, through, and out of armed groups, there will be different suggestions for potential entry points. In addition, just as the means through which children are recruited and the scale to which they are involved in violent activities vary by typology of armed groups, so too do the opportunities for intervention to prevent children from joining groups and facilitating exits for those already involved. In other words, entry points will vary by type of armed group.

Supporting peers who have been successful in persuading others – Peer pressure was often identified as major cause of children and youth becoming involved with armed groups, and
schools in particular could be the site of violence and recruitment, or the site of children using peer pressure to convince young people to leave these groups. Recall the story of the female armed group member in Bauchi who chose to leave the group after being shunned by her fellow classmates. Schools, religious institutions, community groups, and nongovernmental organizations can support these children by providing additional encouragement and skill training for children and youth to serve as role models and support groups for their peers. Although inter-religious dialogue work has been done with adults in the North, one might also try children to children dialogues, for example.

Creating safe places - Since cults and gangs use control of a territorial area as a means of enforcing their power and sweeping up children who live or play in these areas. A possible entry point is to create areas for children and youth that are outside of the control of gangs. Whether it is a community center our sport facilities where children can play without fear of gang retribution or pressure to join a cult. Afterschool programs and sports or social clubs would also be useful ways to provide a safe place to engage children and youth away from the reach of armed groups. Housing Shelters for street kids could also take them out of prime recruitment grounds. It was further suggested that a formalized “street children’s union” could provide some of the same sense of belonging and safety as a cult without the violence.

Working with leaders of Armed Groups -- Perhaps the most surprising response during the research exercise was from some members of armed groups who see themselves as providing protection for children and employment opportunities for youth. One could possibly build on that by engaging the leaders of armed groups in child protection. Vigilante groups were often well respected by the communities and identified as influential actors in preventing or removing children from involvement with armed groups.

Exiting Cults – Respondents told us it was very difficult to leave a cult. Some even suggested that leaving the area completely was the only way to assure exit. Therefore, a possible

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4 For example the MylifE Foundation in South Africa has shown that youth can teach youth positively. They believe that today’s at risk youth are tomorrow’s healers and mentors. See [http://www.mylife.org.za/blog/about-us/our-vision/](http://www.mylife.org.za/blog/about-us/our-vision/).
entry point might be to assist street children with relocation. A more controversial suggestion was to assist with paying the exit fees sometimes required by gangs and cults.

H) Conclusions

We have shown that children are involved in armed groups, gangs, and cults in Nigeria. 

There are varying levels of acknowledgement of that fact among individuals and groups we interviewed. The recruitment, participation, and pathways out of armed groups vary depending on the type of group, and hence localized and particular solutions will be needed to address the problem. However, there are common risk factors. Certain groups are more vulnerable, including street children and those without educational or employment opportunities. Girls are also involved in armed groups. The state must be involved in any efforts to address the issue, though many we interviewed see politicians’ involvement in funding and otherwise supporting various armed groups, as well as linkages between the security forces and certain armed groups. Although there are laws and policies on the books that address children’s rights, these need to be domesticated to the states, and the gaps between official policy and actual practice need to be addressed.

Overall, this research should lead to increased recognition of the participation of children in armed groups, gangs, and cults as a child protection issue as well as a security issue.

Surely, some of our results are not surprising to observers of Nigerian society. Indeed, we started with a “standard story” of the participation of children and young people in armed groups, namely that vulnerable children are recruited into violence because they seek protection, survival, or opportunity. These are children on the margins of society, neglected by their families, ill served by the education system, and victimized by unscrupulous adults.

But this research did turn up some surprising results, including things that surprised the research team:

- Children as young as eight years old are involved with armed groups
- Politicians are sometimes behind these groups, and may actually make efforts to keep children at the same level of poverty
• That there were so many homeless children on the streets (for example the South team discovered that the hawkers in one market were all homeless, and all part of the group “Jungle Boys”).
• That some little children are already cult members without their parents’ knowledge.
• That in the South, some children came to the amnesty camps begging to join the militants, and some ex-militants instead paid to send some of those children to school.

When we presented the preliminary results of this research to a group of Nigerian and international stakeholders in Abuja, we asked, “What did you learn that was new to you?” The surprising results, for them, were:
• The intersection of children in armed groups and child protection concerns
• That girls are involved in gangs and that there are cults exclusively for girls
• The high level of homelessness among street hawkers
• Alleged links between the militias and the security forces
• Alleged links between armed groups and politicians (though these are not always clear)
• The range of ways in and ways out of armed groups
• Did not expect to see children so young
• Surprised at the gap between services provided and beneficiaries’ knowledge of services
• Sophisticated use of drugs by armed groups.

Overall, the conclusions are that the problem is more widespread than commonly acknowledged, and that a range of innovative policy and programs will be needed to address it. These will be addressed in the recommendations section below.
V. Recommendations

The recommendations are divided into two sections: recommendations for further research and recommendations for policy and programming.

1. Recommendations for future research

It is obviously difficult to carry out research on illicit activities, including those of violent armed groups. This was a very preliminary research project, interviewing a range of different types of respondents in four urban areas at one point in time, but there is clearly more to be done. An obvious next step would be a quantitative study with a larger scope. After the presentation of preliminary results, we asked the stakeholders in Abuja what questions still need to be answered, and this yielded some interesting issues for future research:

- What are the links between formal and informal armed groups?
- What is the regional (neighboring countries) dimension?
- The existence of abduction or ritual killings
- What platforms already exist for children?
- The role of new technology (SMS) (how are children using social media). Does this provide new ways for children to be engaged?
- Why is there a gap between policy and practice in programs?
- Are cultural values of different ethnic groups involved?
- Ask recruiters why they recruit children.

2. Recommendations for Policy and Programming

Luke Dowdney (2005), in his comparison of children and youth in organized armed violence across a number of different contexts, is very clear:

To truly treat the problem of children and youth in organised armed violence it is necessary to eliminate the external risk factors identified as causal and/or contributory to both the establishment and continued existence of armed groups, and those risk factors that directly affect young people within high-risk environments. However, as eradicating these risk factors is a lengthy and difficult process, local level interventions that boost
resilience amongst children and youth in affected areas is a more effective … strategy for the short term (337).

He concludes that the factors for success in such projects are:

- Being community based; responding to locally-identified risk factors and influence;
- designing integrated and personalised projects; working with family members;
- integrating involved and non-involved young people in local projects; and involving the target group in the design, coordination and evaluation of the project wherever possible (337).

Shaw (2007), discussing comparative approaches to urban crime prevention focusing on youth, agrees, concluding, “Projects that see youth violence and victimization as a public problem and a health problem, that are inclusive and participatory, and that use a strategic approach built on careful analysis and a balanced array of interventions are likely to be effective in the short and the long term” (12). She goes on to caution that, “Local responses require a careful analysis of local contexts, and must be tailored and adapted to those contexts” (12).

Current best practice requires a strategic and integrated policy that concurrently treats the structural risk factors and develops local level resilience amongst children and youth. Policies should be tailored to local level realities.

Note that this exercise was not meant to map all existing programs. We did not ask questions about programming except to determine service gaps, and did not try to evaluate existing programs. However, our research yielded some ideas for Nigeria broadly and for our four urban locations particularly. (Some of these ideas may already be in place elsewhere in the country, or simply be unknown to our respondents.)

**Communication** – We must better explain to the public why we are doing child protection programming. Provide information to children, the Child Protection Network should provide information where children can go for help. Use the Nigerian film industry to raise awareness of the Child Rights Act.
**Government action** -- Government must be a part of the whole process. Further training of police and other security forces is needed. Reactivate the child units in the police force. Find the “champions” within the government. Find a balance between local action that can really make a change and government involvement. This work may provide a tool for advocacy to help with domestication at state level of the Child Rights Act (UNICEF 2007). The findings of this research may also prove to be a useful tool for international agencies to form new platforms for the engagement of government on federal and state level to implement already existing programs.

**Local Level action** -- Access leaders and communities and jointly determine how to engage children. Nurture and support positive practices at the local level, think small first. Create safe spaces. Strengthen services around election times; amnesty payment times.

**Engage Multiple, even unexpected, Actors** -- Think about how to work with adult members of armed groups, gangs, and cults – what would motivate them to not involve children? Engage labour movements and others civil society organizations. Engage oil companies and other business stakeholders – to build functioning schools in rural areas, for example, to combat rural-urban drift. Encourage small businesses to offer apprenticeships. Engage Koranic schools. Perhaps replicate the program in Kaduna state that regulates teachers of Koranic schools. Consider that Mallams have financial and religious interests.

**Engage children** -- Work with children directly. Engage children to develop ideas on how children can be engaged in politics, and express their own ideas. Engage kids in sport, activities, and clubs. Have children participate in production of radio, television programs.

**Lessons from elsewhere** -- Look at how other countries have addressed this issue. Learn from similar programs in South Africa and Brazil using sports or arts. Several organizations in Africa and elsewhere use football to lure young men away from the culture of gangs and drugs.
One can even look at other areas in Nigeria – NGOs working with street children in Lagos, for example.
### VI. Appendices

#### A) List of Interviewees and Focus Groups

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<tr>
<th>Tracking #</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<td>Warri</td>
<td>Non-State Actor</td>
<td>Francis Owa</td>
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<td>Warri</td>
<td>Children/Youth</td>
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<td>Warri</td>
<td>Armed Group</td>
<td>Michael Amadi</td>
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<td>Warri</td>
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<td>Steven Okoh &amp; Isomol Anthony</td>
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FG 1 Bauchi FG - Adult
FG 2 Bauchi FG - Involved Youths
FG 3 Bauchi FG - Engaged Youth
FG 4 Bauchi FG - Excluded Female
FG 5 Port Harcourt FG - Adult Stakeholders
FG 6 Port Harcourt FG - Excluded Female
FG 7 Port Harcourt FG - Excluded Male
FG 8 Port Harcourt FG - Involved Youth
FG 9 Jos FG - Engaged Youth
FG 10 Jos FG - Excluded Female
FG 11 Jos FG - Excluded Youth
FG 12 Jos FG - Youth
FG 13 Warri FG - Adult
FG 14 Warri FG - Engaged Youth
FG 15 Warri FG - Excluded Males
FG 16 Warri FG - Excluded Female
B) Interview Questions

a) Adult stakeholders

1. In your community/society who makes important decisions? Do you feel youth have a say in these important decisions?
2. How do you feel about security?
3. Tell me about violence in your community? Are there armed groups?
4. Are children involved in those groups? (males and females)
5. What activities are associated with these groups? (males and females)
6. How do children and youths become involved in these groups? (males and females)
7. What are the benefits of joining an armed group? (males and females)
8. Which children or youth are the most vulnerable to recruitment and why?
9. Are there certain moments when they are more vulnerable to recruitment?
10. How does the community treat the young people who are involved in these groups?
11. Who is responsible for helping youth to prevent them from joining (violent) groups? Why are they or why are they not able to do so?
12. What ways have NGOs/communities/government/individuals tried to prevent youth from becoming involved in these groups? Why or why haven’t they worked?
13. What could/should be done to steer children/youth from becoming involved? What challenges are faced?

b) Excluded Females

N.B. Start by saying, here there are no leaders, we are interested in all your opinions.

1. In your community/society who makes important decisions? Do you feel you have a say in these important decisions?
2. Who do you respect in the community? Do you feel respected by others in the community?
3. How do you feel about security?
4. Tell me about violence in your community? Are there armed groups?
5. Are children involved in those groups? (males and females)
6. Are young women’s roles different than men’s?
7. What activities are associated with these groups? (males and females)
8. How do children and youths become involved in these groups? (males and females)
9. What are the benefits of joining an armed group? (males and females)
10. What are the biggest challenges that you face in your life?
11. What opportunities do you have to improve yourselves? What opportunities do you wish you had to improve yourselves?
c) Excluded Males

N.B. Start by saying, here there are no leaders, we are interested in all your opinions.

1. In your community/society who makes important decisions? Do you feel you have a say in these important decisions?
2. Who do you respect in the community? Do you feel respected by others in the community?
3. How do you feel about security?
4. Tell me about violence in your community? Are there armed groups?
5. Are children involved in those groups? (males and females)
6. What activities are associated with these groups? (males and females)
7. How do children and youths become involved in these groups? (males and females)
8. What are the benefits of joining an armed group? (males and females)
9. What are the biggest challenges that you face in your life?
10. What opportunities do you have to improve yourselves? What opportunities do you wish you had to improve yourselves?

d) Involved Youth

N.B. Start by saying, here there are no leaders, we are interested in all your opinions.

1. In your community/society who makes important decisions? Do you feel you have a say in these important decisions?
2. Who do you respect in the community? Do you feel respected by others in the community?
3. How do you feel about security?
4. Tell me about violence in your community? Are there armed groups?
5. Are children involved in those groups? (males and females)
6. What activities are associated with these groups? (males and females)
7. How do children and youths become involved in these groups? (males and females)
8. What are the benefits of joining an armed group? (males and females)
9. What are the biggest challenges that you face in your life?
10. What opportunities do you have to improve yourselves? What opportunities do you wish you had to improve yourselves?

e) Other Adults

1. What is your experience of armed conflict in this area?
2. Have you seen children or youth involved in armed conflict?
3. How do children/youth get into violent activities?
4. How would you describe/profile/stereotype the average youth that becomes involved in armed groups? (Age, gender, family background, religion, education level, attitude, ethnicity, etc.)
5. What about girls? (or other vulnerable groups?)
6. How old are children/youth that are generally involved in armed groups?
7. In what kind of activities are children/youth most likely to be involved?
8. Which armed groups are using children/youth, and to what ends/degree?
9. How does the social network of the child/youth influence his/her involvement in violence? (family/relative’s involvement/association, neighbourhood dynamics, religious groups, influence children/youth participation)
10. What are the methods of recruitment for young people to get involved in armed groups?
11. Are certain types of children/youth being targeted more than others?
12. What are the motivations of children/youth who go ‘voluntarily’ to armed groups? What are direct gains for children/youth?
13. Are there certain moments when there is a high rate of recruitment?
14. How does the community feel about the participation of children/youth in armed groups?
15. How are children/youth that are known to participate in armed groups treated by the community?
16. What efforts are made by the community to help children/youth, or provide alternatives to involvement with armed groups?
17. Does the community welcome them? Are there portions of the community who are less likely to welcome them?
18. What could be done to assist these children or to decrease violence in your community?

f) Armed Groups
1. “What is your experience of armed conflict in this area?” (If they say they have participated themselves, ask…)
2. “How did you get involved? At what age? How long have you been involved?”
3. (Otherwise…) “Have you seen children involved?”
4. (If they say “No.” Ask, “How about youth?”)
6. How would you describe/profile/stereotype the average youth that becomes involved in armed groups?) Age, family background, religion, education level, access to jobs, attitude, ethnicity, etc.)
7. What about girls? (or other vulnerable groups?)
8. How old are children/youth that are generally involved in armed groups?
9. Are there moments when children (or youth) are more likely to be involved in armed groups?
10. Which armed groups are using children/youth, and to what ends/degree?
11. What are the connections between cults, gangs, vigilantes and militant groups? How do their activities impact on children?
12. What is the relationship between children/youth and police/military? How do their activities impact on children?
13. In what kind of activities are children/youth most likely to be involved?
14. What are direct gains for children/youth involved with armed groups?
15. What are the methods of recruitment for young people to get involved in armed groups?
16. How does the social network of the child/youth influence his/her involvement in violence? (family/relative’s involvement/association, neighbourhood dynamics, religious groups, influence children/youth participation)
17. Are certain types of children/youth more likely to be involved than others?
18. What are the motivations of children/youth who go ‘voluntarily’ to armed groups?
19. Are there particular moments when there is a high rate of recruitment?
20. How does the community feel about the participation of children/youth in armed groups?
21. What is the degree of acceptance of using child combatants by the community, family, from which these children originate?
22. Have there been incidents of children trying to leave these groups? (tell me more….)
23. Whose responsibility is it to take care of these children?
24. Are there structures in place that are preventing children from joining armed groups?
25. What could be done to assist these children or to decrease violence in your community?

g) Children and Youth
1. What is your experience of armed conflict in this area?
2. Have you seen children or youth involved in armed conflict?
3. What causes young people to become associated with armed groups?
4. How do children/youth get into violent activities? / - What are the methods of recruitment for young people to get involved in armed groups?
5. How would you describe/profile/stereotype the average youth that becomes involved in armed groups? (Age, family background, religion, education level, access to jobs, attitude, ethnicity, etc.)
6. How old are children/youth that are generally involved in armed groups?
7. Are certain types of children/youth being targeted more than others?
8. What are the motivations of children/youth who go ‘voluntarily’ to armed groups?
9. In what kind of activities are children/youth most likely to be involved?
10. What are direct gains for children/youth?
11. Which armed groups are using children/youth, and to what ends/degree?
12. Are there moments when there is a high rate of recruitment?
13. What is the degree of acceptance of using child combatants by the community, family, from which these children originate?
14. What is the degree of acceptance of youth known to be involved with armed groups by the family and community?
15. What has allowed the armed groups to continue using children/youth without fear of punishment?
16. What do armed groups require in order to release children, and do children want to be released? Why or Why not?
17. Are there groups or people who assist children/youth as they leave armed groups?
18. How are the children treated after they leave armed groups and upon their return to the community?
19. Does the community welcome them? Are there portions of the community who are less likely to welcome them?
20. What could be done to assist these children or to decrease violence in your community?

h) Community Leaders
1. What is your experience of armed conflict in this area?
2. Have you seen children or youth involved in armed conflict?
3. How would you describe/profile/stereotype the average youth that becomes involved in armed groups? (Age, gender, family background, religion, education level, attitude, ethnicity, etc.)
4. What about girls?
5. How old are children/youth that are generally involved in armed groups?
6. In what kind of activities are children/youth most likely to be involved?
7. Which armed groups are using children/youth, and to what ends/degree?
8. How does the social network of the child/youth influence his/her involvement in violence? (family/relative’s involvement/association, neighbourhood dynamics, religious groups, influence children/youth participation)
9. What are the methods of recruitment for young people to get involved in armed groups?
10. Are certain types of children/youth being targeted more than others?
11. What are the motivations of children/youth who go ‘voluntarily’ to armed groups?
12. Are there certain moments when there is a high rate of recruitment?
13. How are children/youth engaged in the community? How has that role changed over time?
14. What role do children/youth play in decision-making?
15. How does the community feel about the participation of children/youth in armed groups?
16. How are children/youth that are known to participate in armed groups treated by the community?
17. Does the community try to bring children out of armed groups?
18. How are the children treated after they leave armed groups and upon their return to the community?
19. Does the community welcome them? Are there portions of the community who are less likely to welcome them?
20. What has allowed the armed groups to continue using children/youth without fear of punishment?
21. What efforts are made by the community to help children/youth, or provide alternatives to involvement with armed groups?
22. What are the challenges to addressing the involvement of children/youth in armed groups?
23. What new strategies could be put in place to address the involvement of children/youth in armed groups?

For religious leaders:
24. Is children/youth’s involvement in armed groups, in part, motivated by their religious belief? Their membership in a religious organization?
25. What alternatives do religious communities/organizations provide for children/youth involved in armed groups?

i) State Representatives
1. What is your experience of armed conflict in this area?
2. Have you seen children or youth involved in armed conflict?
3. How do children/youth get into violent activities? (recruitment)
4. How would you describe/profile/stereotype the average youth that becomes involved in armed groups? (Age, family background, religion, education level, access to jobs, attitude, ethnicity, etc.)
5. What about girls?
6. How old are children/youth that are generally involved in armed groups?
7. How does the social network of the child/youth influence his/her involvement in violence? (family/relative’s involvement/association, neighbourhood dynamics, religious groups)
8. Are certain types of children/youth being targeted more than others?
9. What are the motivations of children/youth who go ‘voluntarily’ to armed groups? What are direct gains for children/youth?
10. Are there moments when there is a high rate of recruitment?
11. In what kind of activities are children/youth most likely to be involved?
12. Which armed groups are using children/youth, and to what ends/degree?
13. What do armed groups require in order to release children, and do children want to be released?
14. What has allowed the armed groups to continue using children/youth without fear of punishment?
15. What alternatives to association with armed groups are available to children/youth?
16. What major policies/initiatives are in place to address children/youth issues?
17. What interventions have already been attempted regarding children and armed groups? Have they worked or not worked?
18. What systems are in place to assist children/youth as they leave armed groups?
19. What are the challenges to addressing the involvement of children/youth in armed groups?
20. What does cooperation between stakeholders look like? What can make cooperation better?
21. What new strategies could be put in place to address the involvement of children/youth in armed groups?
22. Are children/youth included in dialogue/consulted on policy/development particularly when it concerns children/youth? What opportunities are made available for children/youth to become more involved in decision-making/policy process?

Police/Military
1. What is the relationship between children/youth and police/military?
2. How does the community perceive the police/military?
3. What is the current role of youth in security operations?
4. What should be the role of youth in security operations?
5. What is the current role of children in security operations?
6. What should be the role of children in security operations?
7. How do you tell the difference between youth and children?
8. How do you treat child offenders? What about children associated with armed groups?
9. What causes young people to become associated with armed groups?
10. Do you see it as your role to protect the rights of children? Are you making any efforts to do so?
11. Do the police work with or support child protection structures?

j) Non-State Actors, Civil Society
1. What is your experience of armed conflict in this area?
2. Have you seen children or youth involved in armed conflict?
3. How old are children/youth that are generally involved in armed groups?
4. What are the methods of recruitment for young people to get involved in armed groups?
5. How would you describe/profile/stereotype the average youth that becomes involved in armed groups? (Age, family background, religion, education level, access to jobs, attitude, ethnicity, etc.)
6. What about girls? (or other vulnerable groups?)
7. Are certain types of children/youth being targeted more than others?
8. Are there moments when there is a high rate of recruitment?
9. In what kind of activities are children/youth most likely to be involved?
10. What are direct gains for children/youth?
11. Which armed groups are using children/youth, and to what ends/degree?
12. What alternatives to association with armed groups are available to children/youth?
13. How are children/youth that are known to participate in armed groups treated by the community?
14. Does the community try to bring children out of armed groups?
15. What efforts are made by the community to help children/youth, or provide alternatives to involvement with armed groups?

16. How are children/youth engaged in the community? How has that role changed over time?

17. What role do children/youth play in decision-making in the community?

18. Is children/youth’s involvement in armed groups, in part, motivated by their religious belief? Their membership in a religious organization?

19. What alternatives do religious communities/organizations provide for children/youth involved in armed groups?

20. Are there programs designed specifically to address the issues of children involved in/affected by armed groups? What about for girls?

21. Are children in armed groups part of your programming? Tell me more.

22. To what extent do you include children/youth participation in your programming?

23. What interventions have been successful/unsuccesful? Why?

24. Are children/youth included in dialogue/consulted on policy/development particularly when it concerns children/youth? What opportunities are made available for children/youth to become more involved in decision-making/policy process?

25. How are children/youth associated with armed groups portrayed in the media?

26. What opportunities are available for children/youth to express their opinions through the media?

27. What major policies/initiatives are in place to address children/youth issues? How effective are they?

28. Do the police work with or support child protection structures?

29. What is being done to expand other social services for children?

30. What has allowed the armed groups to continue using children/youth without fear of punishment?

31. What are the challenges to addressing the involvement of children/youth in armed groups?

32. To what degree are there effective networks of NGOs working together on activities related to children/youth?

33. What is the relationship between NGOs and government entities that work on children and youth?

34. What are emerging opportunities or new strategies for addressing the involvement of children/youth in armed groups?

35. Can you direct us to some of your child beneficiaries to interview?
C) Informed Consent

Informed Consent for Interview Respondents

Purpose of study:

This study is being conducted by Search for Common Ground – Nigeria with support from UNICEF, by a research consultant and a team of research assistants in order to gather data about the situation of children affected by armed conflict in the Niger Delta and the Northern region of Nigeria. We are interviewing a range of stakeholders with knowledge about this issue.

Informed Consent:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You will receive no payment for your participation in this study. However, by participating, you are helping UNICEF learn about child protection issues in Nigeria, which will possibly contribute to the design of better programs. The only risk to you participating is possible distress at the retelling of traumatic events. You are not obligated to answer any questions, and you may choose to discontinue the interview at any time.

Your participation is confidential. That is, although we will include a list of key informants, when the final report is written, no one will be able to connect your name or answers. So, please feel free to answer openly and honestly.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact the principal investigator, Dr. Susan Shepler, at shepler@american.edu or by mobile at +08130566422.

Thanks for your participation.

Interviewer Date Interviewee Date

Optional

unicef

unite for children
D) Researcher Biographies

Augustine Bisina (Austen) is experienced in conducting research and working with communities in the Niger Delta region. He worked for four years with Niger Delta Professionals for Development (NIDPRODEV) where he conducted sustainable livelihood assessments and compiled data for the development of a Citizen Report Card capturing 120 communities in three states. He holds a Master’s degree in Social Studies from the University of Benin and a Bachelor’s degree in Social Studies from Delta State University.

Sylvester Andamowie Sede is a Media Outreach Specialist for Search for Common Ground, Nigeria. Originally from Bayelsa state, Sylvester is an experienced radio and TV presenter and producer working for AIT/RAYPOWER FM. He has also worked as a teacher and in the technology field. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in Mechanical Engineering from Niger Delta University in Bayelsa state.

Ishmael Atorudibo has had a long career working the oil and gas industry. Since his retirement from the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Ishmael has worked in the fields of corporate responsibility, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution and currently sits on the board of the Africa Centre for Corporate Responsibility (ACCR), Nigeria. He holds a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Petroleum Training Institute in Delta State.

Thomas Ngolo Katta, a native of Sierra Leone, is the National Coordinator at the Centre for Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA) in Sierra Leone and is the Chair of the Board of Directors for the Youth Alliance for Peace and Development (YAPAD) and a member of the Board of Governors of the Institute of Electoral Administration and Civic education (INEACE). Ngolo has considerable experience in conducting participatory action research specifically with youth affected by conflict. He holds a Bachelor’s degree from Njala University College in Sierra Leone a Post-Graduate Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development from Imperial College, University of London.

Lantana Bako Abdullahi is a Program Officer for Search for Common Ground (SFCG), Jos. She was actively involved in the design and development of the West Africa Conflict Assessment (WACA) Framework for Nigeria supported by USAID in conjunction with ECOWAS. Lantana has been integrally involved in organizing peace conferences in her native Plateau state and participated in several local and international development trainings. Lantana has previously worked in the fields of women’s empowerment, women and youth development, and served as a resource person for several workshops/trainings. She holds a Higher Diploma from Plateau State Polytechnic.

Sarah Nankyer Bentu is a Research Officer with Youth Action for Peace & Justice in Jos, Plateau state. Sarah has participated in and facilitated a number of workshops on democracy, conflict prevention/resolution, and organizational management. She completed her service with the National Youth Service Corp with the Bauchi Local Government Council in Bauchi state. She holds a Master’s degree in International Relations and Strategic Studies from the University of Jos.
E) Works Cited


Okpukpara, Chiedozie Benjamin, Paul U. Chine, Fidelsi Nwele O Uguru, Chukwuone


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