

NO RESEARCH ABOUT US WITHOUT US

**POLICY MEMO: PARTICIPATORY POLICY-ORIENTED RESEARCH
WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFECTED BY CONFLICT**



UNITED NATIONS
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Centre for Policy Research



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Summary

In research on and programming aimed at them, children and youth are usually treated as passive subjects and beneficiaries rather than as partners. In an effort to address this gap in its own research, the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR) partnered with War Child UK to design and pilot a participatory research approach. The goal behind this effort was to examine the needs and goals of children who are exiting armed groups and reintegrating back into society after conflict involvement as well as those of the communities they settle in. This policy memo examines this challenge (p. 1), details the UNU-CPR/War Child approach (pp. 2-3), provides an overview of the process (pp. 4-7) and substantive findings (pp. 8-9) from the pilots, and lays out several policy and programming recommendations for consideration (pp. 10-13).

The Problem

There have long been concerns that the international community's support for people exiting armed conflict can be overly rigid, formulaic,¹ and poorly suited to their needs.² This is particularly true with regard to children and women. Even research and assessments on the unique needs of children impacted by conflict often fail to sufficiently engage the very population that they seek to understand.³ Rarely do young people have a voice in peace processes and related preparations for reintegration support, further reducing the likelihood that the policies and programming aimed at them will address their needs or capitalize on their potential.⁴

There is widespread demand for evidence-based approaches to policymaking and programme design; and specifically, when it comes to children, an appeal for a better understanding of what children, their families and their communities need after conflict association. Moreover, there is growing recognition of the value of including beneficiaries – especially those that have fewer official channels of expression, like children and youth – in crafting and implementing support programmes aimed at them. Indeed, research in other contexts has shown that when individuals – specifically children – are engaged in analysing the causes of violent conflict and developing tailored solutions, the potential for change is significantly enhanced.⁵ Yet, doing the necessary outreach and participatory research and assessment is often seen as complicated,⁶ expensive, difficult (especially within short-term funding timelines) and interfering with the timely delivery of essential services. As a result, it is rarely done or done in a robust or nuanced way.

¹ Christine Ryan, *Children of War: Child Soldiers as Victims and Participants in the Sudan Civil War* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 20–23.

² *Do No Harm: International Support for Statebuilding* (OECD: Paris, 2010), p.93

³ See Siobhan O'Neil, "Child Recruitment and Use by Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict," in Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven, eds., *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict*, (United Nations University: New York, 2018). Children involved with conflict can be a difficult population to access to due insecurity, state, armed group or community reticence, and research restrictions. Indeed, "Even when child soldiers can be identified, access or ethical concerns around engaging them often impede research (e.g., risk of being identified and targeted by their former group or the security services). In addition, stringent regulations govern scholarly research on child subjects (e.g., institutional review boards [IRBs]), discouraging scholars from pursuing research on the topic. In the United States, for example, beyond existing protections for human subjects, federal regulations and a wide range of state laws and requirements govern research with children or minors and can make it difficult to get approval for research on child soldiers or may impact the sample studied, thus potentially introducing unintended bias (e.g., parental consent when many child soldiers have lost or been separated from their parents). Given the requirements and potential for harm to child subjects, IRBs are wary to grant permission for such research." p. 39, n. 2.

⁴ *Siobhan McEvoy-Levy, "Youth and the Challenges of 'Post-Conflict' Peacebuilding"*, available from <https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/1067-youth-and-the-challenges-of-post-conflict-peacebuilding.html>

⁵ In one study in the United States, adult facilitators used semi-structured scripts and activity guides to help children develop their own student conflict-prevention programming specific to their schools, which resulted in significant declines in conflict. Those schools that had child-led interventions saw more than a 30 per cent reduction in conflict in just one year. Elizabeth Levy Paluck, Hana Shepard, and Peter M. Aronow, "Changing Climates of Conflict: A Social Network Experiment in 56 Schools", *PNAS*, Vol. 113, No. 3 (2016).

⁶ "Engaging children and youth as research subjects has proven challenging for a number of reasons: First, the child protection community is divided about whether researchers should directly engage war-affected children. Some believe the potential for such interactions to re-traumatize vulnerable children outweighs any benefits of interviewing them. Others in the community fiercely advocate for direct engagement to ensure that children's voices are brought into policy discussions and that their agency, views, and needs help drive the design of policy and programmatic responses." Siobhan O'Neil, "Child Recruitment and Use by Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict," in Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven, eds., *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict*, (United Nations University: New York, 2018), p. 27.

This shortcoming is deeply problematic. Failure to engage in this type of participatory research and outreach reduces the likelihood that analyses of children's needs are valid. Without accurate and nuanced information, the resulting programming is unlikely to be sufficiently tailored to be effective. More broadly, failure to engage beneficiaries⁷ as partners reduces potential buy-in for interventions and likely their efficacy in supporting positive and sustainable transitions out of conflict.

Piloting a Possible Way Forward

UNU-CPR's previous research on the recruitment and use of children by armed groups in contemporary conflict identified this problem and highlighted the need for engaging children and youth "in the initial assessment, design, and implementation stages of prevention and release/reintegration programming".⁸ In an effort to address this need in its own work, UNU-CPR has strived to ensure that its follow-on initiative, Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC),⁹ prioritized engaging with young people not just as research subjects, but as research partners. The MEAC project seeks to include the voices of young people impacted by conflict in its research on how to better design and implement programming aimed at young people like them.

To this end, UNU-CPR partnered with War Child, an NGO focused on addressing children's pressing needs during and after conflict – particularly with regard to their education, protection, and livelihoods – to pilot a participatory approach to reintegration-related research.

For six months, UNU-CPR and War Child worked together to design a participatory workshop model to assess the needs of children and youth impacted by conflict (particularly those children once associated with armed forces and armed groups) and engage them in discussions around the design and administration of support that could assist young people like them.¹⁰ The workshops were designed to be conducted through War Child's VoiceMore programme, a multi-year advocacy training and mentorship project that empowers young people affected by war to have a say in the decisions that affect them. In August and September 2019, the model was pilot tested through War Child's VoiceMore groups in Bossangoa and Paoua, Central African Republic (CAR).

The three-day workshops combined a variety of engaging, child- and conflict-sensitive activities to try to better understand:

- what exiting armed conflict meant in the local context to those who had experienced it and to the communities that receive them;
- what doing well in their society means and how war-affected youth can achieve their goals;
- what the challenges and risks, as well as the sources of strength and support, are for those leaving armed conflict;
- and how – if they were in charge – they would design and implement support for young people affected by conflict.

⁷ The term beneficiaries suggests a passive relationship. War Child refers to "beneficiaries" as "programme participants" in recognition that service users should be participating in the service they receive.

⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

⁹ The Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) initiative is a multi-year collaboration to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluate the efficacy of interventions meant to help support their transition to civilian life. MEAC is generously supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), and run in partnership with DPO, UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank and IOM.

¹⁰ These two groups were established in the spring of 2019 with participants from across their communities, with an equal gender split and half of the children and youth having been formally associated with armed groups.

Observations and Findings

Through the course of these workshops, several process observations and substantive findings emerged:

PROCESS OBSERVATIONS:

- **Infrastructure for Engagement** – It is extremely difficult to do this type of participatory work with young people when there is rarely a culture to support it. Given the sensitivity of the subject matter, it is unlikely that young people, especially those who have been associated with armed groups or armed forces, will share their experiences and perspectives with strangers. Likewise, in many conflict-affected societies, there often is no culture of sharing such experiences. Young people often cannot access decision-making forums, and even when they can, their opinions are rarely valued and respected. For many young people who have not had access to education, there is no framework for conducting research and analysis, the basics of which need to be understood if they are to play a collaborative role in research (and possibly, even programme design and implementation). The CAR workshops made clear that investments in a safe forum for engaging young people, and training them to analyse problems in their society and speak up for solutions – like War Child is doing with VoiceMore – are key for building towards effective engagement.
- **Trust** – Having an existing engagement infrastructure was essential for the UNU-CPR/War Child workshops to ensure honest and forthright communication. With its three plus year timeline and in-town presence, the VoiceMore programme allowed for continued engagement with the same staff and facilitators, which helped build a safe space for sharing. Young people who have been through similar experiences, and who have been involved in the programme as participants, were well positioned to shepherd these discussions. Lastly, by working with a videographer who uses participatory approaches to capturing programme content, it was possible to document the workshops in a collaborative, rather than extractive, manner. There are concerns that filming could potentially discourage some participants from engaging in workshop activities, and a participatory approach can help mitigate this effect.
- **Conflict-sensitive Engagement** – To understand what ex-CAAFAG (children associated with armed forces and armed groups) need for reintegration requires an understanding of their specific experiences. Yet it is important that this line of inquiry does not further contribute to the stigmatization of ex-CAAFAG or to community tensions. The workshops were designed and implemented in a way that prevented identification of participants who had once been associated with armed groups, and sensitive questions were asked in an indirect manner to allow individuals to speak freely without identifying an experience as personal. In addition, as is standard for all War Child engagement, efforts were taken to protect the privacy of participants in any outputs of the workshop.
- **Child- and Youth- Sensitive Engagement** – The workshops were designed to be child-sensitive. They were tailored to shorter attention spans and employed a wide range of formats from plenary discussions, working groups, artistic and musical expression to different types of oral and written presentations. Such an approach is important from both an ethics and a research standpoint. Ensuring the workshop content and activities were accessible and engaging helped ensure the reliability of the information shared, as a child-sensitive format enhances participant understanding, encourages feedback, and reduces participant fatigue. Feedback from the Bossangoa and Paoua VoiceMore groups suggests more can be done to improve the accessibility of the workshop session plan and script and build the confidence of the participations. Most importantly, the workshops were built on the [child protection and safeguarding principles](#) that War Child uses in all its work and which had been previously introduced to the participants of its programmes in CAR.

- **Flexibility** – At times, the facilitators needed to adjust the schedule to accommodate the needs of participants and the nuances of the local context – and having flexibility built into the workshop schedule allowed them to do so. During the introduction to the workshop in Bossangoa, it became clear that some of the participants were struggling with the basic concept of exiting armed groups/forces, because in their community, a hard break from armed actors is rarely possible due to family ties and proximity. It was important to reserve sufficient time to ensure that the workshop’s basic scoping and orientation responded to the participants’ reality, and that everyone involved fully understood what they were being asked to do. Allocating sufficient time dedicated to this type of introduction, clarification, and consent – and the flexibility to adapt the workshop structure, language, and research questions, as issues are raised – was essential.
- **Lost in Translation** – Another challenge related to ensuring clarity of purpose in the workshops was translation. In translating the workshop script from English to French to Sangho there were times when it was difficult to identify the right words to capture important concepts. There were cases where the linguistic frame for certain concepts did not exist at all in some languages. This can be especially difficult when dealing with more abstract concepts like reintegration¹¹, which youth participants may find difficult to tangibly place in their own experience. A related challenge was encouraging participants to communicate in the language they were most comfortable in. In their prior work, War Child realized that most participants – despite having Sangho as their mother tongue – felt they should express themselves in French, even though they did not have the same degree of competence in the language. To ensure all the participants fully understood the exercises and each other in the UNU-CPR/War Child workshops, however, the facilitators insisted that all sessions and participation occur in Sangho. While this created an additional translation requirement, it allowed for a more authentic and effective communication. To further enhance the exchange of information – as well as accommodate different levels of literacy and numeracy – the workshops also encouraged participants to choose different communication methods that they feel comfortable with, such as art and music. The added benefit of this approach was that it engaged another part of children’s brains and allowed them to express themselves in different and creative ways.
- **Participant Composition** – The groups in Bossangoa and Paoua were mixed - comprised of ex-CAAFAG and war affected youth, with equal representation of males and females (ages 15 to 24). There are benefits and challenges to working with mixed groups that needed to be addressed in the workshop design and facilitation. While it is important to understand differences between those who have been associated with armed groups and those who have not, the questions to get at these issues need to be posed carefully so as not to identify and further stigmatize certain participants. It is also important that the line of questioning does not assume a strict delineation between the experiences of non-affiliated children and youth and former CAAFAG, as this delineation may not exist with regard to the violence, hardships, and stressors they have experienced. Likewise, it is important to use such engagement opportunities to try to better understand the gender dimensions of conflict exit and transition, but without reinforcing structural inequalities and stereotypes. The composition of the break-out groups in the Bossangoa and Paoua workshops required careful consideration of when it made sense to separate the group along certain lines, whether the criteria for the sub-groups would or would not be articulated, and what additional steps were needed to draw out certain participants to ensure everyone regardless of gender or status could be heard.
- **Showcasing Skillsets and Maximizing Comfort** – Responding to the particular interests and skills of the young people in each community was important. Given the musical talent and interests in the Bossangoa group, UNU-CPR and War Child introduced a workshop session where participants composed a song to tell the world what kind of future they wanted for their children. This allowed the young people in the Bossangoa group to express themselves with confidence and creativity, and ensured enthusiastic participation and a varied, multi-media approach to inquiry.

¹¹ As defined by the Paris Principles, child reintegration is “the process through which children transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation.” *The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups* (2007), available from <https://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/ParisPrinciples310107English.pdf> p. 7.

- **Feedback Loop** – With all research, but particularly with participatory research approaches, it is important to communicate the findings back to participants. Closing the feedback loop is especially important with young people who are trying to find their voice as advocates for social change in their community. As part of their commitment to ensure that the young people of Bossangoa and Paoua know how their workshop participation and outputs will be used to inform the MEAC project and broader policy discussions in the UN, UNU-CPR and War Child have taken the following steps:
 - a. War Child held an initial follow-up session with each group a week after the workshops to provide a short update and gather feedback from them. War Child will hold subsequent meetings with the young people in both locations to provide an update on how the information they shared at the workshops is feeding into the MEAC project and informing the broader discussions around child reintegration and youth engagement at the UN.
 - b. UNU-CPR and War Child are documenting the uptake of this Policy Memo, related outputs, and events to share with the workshop participants. This effort to close the feedback loop was prioritized out of respect for the time and attention that the participants gave to the workshops. Moreover, it is the hope of UNU-CPR and War Child that this feedback will help the young people of Bossangoa and Paoua grow as advocates and reinforce their value and sense of purpose as agents for change in their communities.

SUBSTANTIVE FINDINGS:

- **A Clean Exit?** – Some of the young participants had trouble grasping the concept of armed group exit as it was initially presented because it did not align with their experience. Many young people have a hard time completely severing ties with armed groups because their families and communities remain involved and due to the proximity and continued influence of the groups.¹² This reaction echoes the findings of UNU-CPR's *Cradled by Conflict* research, which noted that “the international community maintains outdated and unrealistic notions of how children leave armed groups and their prospects for reintegration in unstable contexts.”¹³ If children and youth are not fully disengaging from armed groups, it may be necessary for the international community to adjust the assumptions that underly its assessments and the expectations for programming to better reflect and respond to local realities.
- **Doing Well in Northern CAR** – When asked about what it meant to do well in life, the young people provided many characteristics that would be cited elsewhere: being polite, loving, kind, volunteering, showing intelligence and bravery. Counterintuitively, they also added being “a bad guy”. The facilitators were confused and asked if there had been a misunderstanding. No, the participants responded, every good, model person can become bad depending on the circumstances imposed on her/him. Again, this observation from young people in CAR reiterates evidence on child and youth involvement with armed groups from other contexts. Contrary to conventional wisdom, UNU-CPR found that hate and extreme ideologies are not the predominant driver for children to join armed groups.¹⁴ Rather, children become associated with armed groups for a number of interrelated reasons that range from extreme coercion to the mundane. Under certain conditions, even the most pro-social, “normal” children are susceptible to involvement in violent organizations. These findings highlight the challenge of prevention: while some children certainly may be exposed to more risks than others, making them particularly vulnerable, there is no “type”, no single path into an armed group. Under the “right” circumstances, research suggests almost anyone could become involved with conflict actors.
- **Signs of Conflict Exit** – When asked what would signal that someone had left an armed group, the participants said those who: no longer attend group meetings, get rid of their weapons, and change their behaviour. Moreover, they mentioned the need for someone to change their heart and their mind – shifting their emotional attachment and identity away from the armed group. Beyond shifting one’s engagement in and orientation to conflict, the participants outlined positive transformations, such as becoming a role model

¹² Siobhan O’Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven, “Executive Summary” in O’Neil and Van Broeckhoven, eds., *Cradled by Conflict*, p. 18.

¹³ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁴ Siobhan O’Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven with research assistance from Kabba Williams, “The Road to a Better Future” in O’Neil and Van Broeckhoven eds., *Cradled by Conflict*, p. 238.

to others about following a good path and advising your community. The young people acknowledged that the community might not fully agree with the list of exit characteristics that they put together, highlighting that exiting a conflict is a two-way street and not something that occurs in a vacuum. Even if young people have every intention of remaining uninvolved after they leave an armed group, if the community refuses to recognize their exit or remains suspicious and closed to them, a full break from an armed group may be difficult. Likewise, if the environments young people reintegrate into remain under the influence of armed groups, it may be difficult to survive or function economically or socially without interacting with them in some way.

- **Retaining Weapons** – Despite identifying laying down arms as a key component to exiting armed conflict, the young participants acknowledged that many people retain their weapons. They shared their views that young people do so because they are awaiting Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and believe they need the weapon to be eligible for DDR (or that it can be exchanged for cash) or think that the conflict may flare up again and require them to take up arms. These experiences further underline the research finding that exiting an armed group is unlikely a single event, and that neither desistance from conflict-related violence nor disengagement from an armed group are likely to be linear processes.¹⁵ The young people who participated in the workshops seemed well aware that the continued stressors of daily life in a conflict-affected community could easily push young people back towards armed groups.
- **Challenges to Leaving Armed Conflict** – The main challenges identified by the young people of Bossangoa and Paoua overlapped significantly; they were stigma, being rejected by family/community, fear of revenge, fear of prison, uncertainty about if the conflict is actually over, unmet basic needs (e.g., shelter), not having alternative livelihoods and activities (including school), and not having the documentation necessary to travel.
- **Sources of Support After Leaving Armed Conflict** – The following sources of support for children and youth leaving armed groups were identified by participants: a supportive family, a welcoming community, friends/colleagues, programmatic support (e.g., DDR, which was specifically mentioned), community activities, and the presence of international organizations and NGOs. Interestingly, “having documentation” (to facilitate movement) and “being able to leave for another area” were cited, suggesting young people may not want (or be welcome) to return home or perhaps see more opportunity in larger cities and locales beyond their home communities. While it has long been the focus of child reintegration efforts to reunite children with their families after conflict involvement, it may be important during initial assessments to gauge where children would prefer to settle (recognizing this might change over time) and consider if interventions could be adapted accordingly.
- **How Young People Would Design Reintegration Support** – In both workshops, the young people felt they did not have enough time to address this question in the depth they would have liked. It is unclear if this was primarily due to time constraints (i.e. a flaw in the workshop design), or if the prospect of providing programmatic advice to international actors was unfamiliar or intimidating. Although the participants expressed concerns that their inputs were not fully formed, their discussions were quite informative. Particular aspects of support highlighted in Paoua, for example, were community sensitization and support for alternative livelihoods and activities (schooling, vocational training, income generating activities). The community, according to participants in Paoua, would need to be included – both as beneficiary and advisors and supporters of the programme. It is clear that to optimize child and youth inputs into reintegration programmes, more needs to be done to acclimatize young people to such discussions and concepts, engage them in ways they feel comfortable with, and work to boost their confidence.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 246.

Moving Forward - Policy and Programming Considerations and Options

1. Raise Awareness about the Value of Participatory Research and Assessment to Support Effective Programming

– There are a number of key legal, policy, and research documents and agreements¹⁶ that policymakers and practitioners can highlight and draw on for justification and guidance in initiating participatory work with war-affected children and youth. In addition, the benefits of regular consultations with conflict-affected young people and the need for and value of engaging them throughout the course of the programming cycle (i.e., pre-programme assessment, design, implementation, and impact assessment) could be further highlighted and championed.

2. Promote Meaningful Engagement with Young People About Programmes Meant to Serve Them

– There are numerous ways to encourage more robust engagement with young people in need of support after conflict involvement. For example,

- a. The Security Council, when mandating support for ex-CAAFAG, could consider strengthening the language around ‘taking into account the particular needs of children’ to ensure that peacekeeping missions actively engage young programme participants in decisions that will impact them.
- b. Donors could help encourage more meaningful engagement with young people by requiring contribution proposals and donor reporting to document how programmes worked to ensure young people’s voices inform or informed programming and how recipients are or were involved in its design and implementation.
- c. Donors could go further by requiring a certain percentage of contributions to reintegration programming to be allocated for participatory work (e.g., pre-programme assessment, programme design, implementation, and assessment).
- d. As part of their pre-programme assessments, practitioners could consider enhancing the focus on understanding what a full exit from an armed group means to those who have made/tried to make this transition, as well as the signs of a full exit in the eyes of community. This information could be used to influence interventions to target residual connections with armed groups after exit and other challenges to full and sustainable exits. Likewise, a better understanding of what exiting an armed group means in a particular location can help practitioners tailor impact assessment metrics to the local context.

Recognizing that stigma remains one of the main concerns and challenges for young people trying to exit armed groups, more needs to be done to address stigma. The young people themselves identified the need for more sensitization outreach with communities of return. Beyond specific interventions, the international community should also consider the ways in which its programmes could inadvertently reinforce stigmatization due to the composition and branding of programmes (e.g., the narrow targeting of certain groups, branding programmes as “deradicalization”).¹⁷

¹⁶ For example, see: the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and the 1996 European Convention of the Exercise of Children’s Rights (ECECR), which establish the right of children to express their views and be heard. For an example of participatory approach to impact evaluation see, Irene Guijt, *Participatory Approaches - Methodological Briefs: Impact Evaluation 5* (Florence: UNICEF Office of Research, 2014), available from www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/brief_5_participatoryapproaches_eng.pdf

¹⁷ O’Neil and Van Broeckhoven with research assistance from Kabba Williams, “The Road to a Better Future” in O’Neil and Van Broeckhoven eds., *Cradled by Conflict*, p. 251.

3. Amplify Emerging Practice and Share Participatory Research and Assessment Tools – While, by most accounts, this type of participatory work with young people is not systematically included as part of reintegration programme design and implementation, there are some practices and guidance that are worth noting.

- a. It would be useful to highlight emerging practice and make tools and guidance available to reinforce the importance of this type of work and assist practitioners who would like to incorporate it into their research and/or programming. For example, UNICEF's Middle East and North Africa Office has just released *Yes We Can! A How-to Guide on Implementing Participatory Action Research with Adolescents and Youth*.
- b. As part of this effort, UNU-CPR and War Child have published their workshop scripts in two languages and a logistics guide to allow other researchers and practitioners to adapt this approach in other contexts.
- c. In addition, UNU-CPR and War Child have released a full costing of their pilot programmes in Bossangoa and Paoua (including costs absorbed by War Child in CAR) to share with donors, institutional partners, and implementing organizations as an example of the accessibility of incorporating such an approach into their programme planning.
- d. It is worth considering if there are central locations where these types of tools and resources could be stored. It may also be worth exploring how existing coordination mechanisms for child protection, reintegration and conflict transitions can encourage their use.
- e. If more researchers, practitioners, and implementing partners document their efforts in conducting participatory research and assessments with young people, different processes can be compared and approaches can be further strengthened.

NO RESEARCH ABOUT US WITHOUT US

A PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP SESSION PLAN AND SCRIPT
FOR PARTICIPATORY POLICY RESEARCH WITH WAR AFFECTED
CHILDREN AND YOUTH



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Introduction

Thirty years ago, the Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrined children's right to freedom of expression, and the right to have their views inform all matters affecting them. This right, however, has not always been reflected in practice. There have long been concerns that the international community's support for people exiting armed groups and armed forces – particularly children – can be overly rigid, formulaic,¹ and unresponsive to their needs.² Even research and assessments on the unique needs of children impacted by conflict often fail to sufficiently engage the very population that they seek to understand.³ Rarely do young people have a voice in peace processes and related preparations for reintegration support, further reducing the likelihood that the policies and programming that are aimed at them will address their needs or capitalize on their potential.⁴

There is widespread demand for evidence-based approaches to policymaking and programme design, and specifically, when it comes to children, a demand for greater understanding of what children need after conflict association. Moreover, there is growing recognition and evidence⁵ of the benefit of including beneficiaries – especially those that have fewer official channels of expression, like children and youth – in crafting and implementing support programmes aimed at them.

To demonstrate the value and accessibility of thoughtful, collaborative and child-friendly engagement⁶ to guide research and programming, the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR) and War Child UK collaborated to pilot a participatory research workshop on reintegration.

The resulting workshop session plan and script were designed with the idea that they would be run through War Child's VoiceMore groups. VoiceMore is a multi-year advocacy training and mentorship project that empowers young people affected by war to have a say in the decisions that affect them.⁷ In August and September 2019, this workshop model was pilot tested through War Child's VoiceMore groups in Bossangoa and Paoua, Central African Republic (CAR), which were comprised of young people affected by conflict. Half the group was male and half was female, ages ranged from 15-24 years old, and the group included some former CAAFAG (children associated with armed forces and armed groups).

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- ¹ Christine Ryan, *Children of War: Child Soldiers as Victims and Participants in the Sudan Civil War* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 20–23.
 - ² Do No Harm: *International Support for Statebuilding* (OECD: Paris, 2010), p. 93
 - ³ See Siobhan O'Neil, "Child Recruitment and Use by Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict," in Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven, eds., *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict*, (United Nations University: New York, 2018). Children involved with conflict can be a difficult population to access to due insecurity, state, armed group or community reticence, and research restrictions. Indeed, "Even when child soldiers can be identified, access or ethical concerns around engaging them often impede research (e.g., risk of being identified and targeted by their former group or the security services). In addition, stringent regulations govern scholarly research on child subjects (e.g., institutional review boards [IRBs]), discouraging scholars from pursuing research on the topic. In the United States, for example, beyond existing protections for human subjects, federal regulations and a wide range of state laws and requirements govern research with children or minors and can make it difficult to get approval for research on child soldiers or may impact the sample studied, thus potentially introducing unintended bias (e.g., parental consent when many child soldiers have lost or been separated from their parents). Given the requirements and potential for harm to child subjects, IRBs are wary to grant permission for such research." p. 39, n. 2.
 - ⁴ Siobhan McEvoy-Levy, "Youth and the Challenges of 'Post-Conflict' Peacebuilding", available from <https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/1067-youth-and-the-challenges-of-post-conflict-peacebuilding.html>
 - ⁵ Research in other contexts has shown that when individuals – specifically children – are engaged in analysing the causes of violent conflict, and then crafting and implementing solutions tailored to address local problems, the potential for change is significant. For example, in one study in the United States, adult facilitators used semi-structured scripts and activity guides to help children develop their own student-led prevention programming to address conflict specific to their schools, which resulted in significant declines in conflict. Those schools that had child-led interventions saw more than a 30 per cent reduction in conflict in just one year. Elizabeth Levy Paluck, Hana Shepard, and Peter M. Aronow, "Changing Climates of Conflict: A Social Network Experiment in 56 Schools", *PNAS*, Vol. 113, No. 3 (2016).
 - ⁶ This script was designed for a group of young people who had already gone through some advocacy training and engaged in workshop like discussions previously. For those who have never participated in such engagement, more may need to be done to adapt the sessions and scripts to more limited understandings of some of the concepts discussed therein as well as lower confidence levels. Moreover, some of the concepts and approaches included in this session plan and script would require further adaptation if participants do not have basic literacy, numeracy, or verbal communication. There are several points throughout the script where options for such adaptation are noted in footnotes.
 - ⁷ Operating in four countries, the VoiceMore programme trains young people to be effective spokespeople in their communities and peer groups, conduct research on an issue they have selected, and share their recommendations through advocacy.

While the session plan and script that follow can be used outside the VoiceMore programme, it would be difficult to run a workshop that was as mutually useful and one that mitigated possible harm to participants without some sort of pre-existing engagement infrastructure like it. Likewise, without a pre-existing forum for engaging young people the workshops would have cost more. For others seeking to do participatory research or engage young people as partners in programming, it is certainly possible to build the UNU-CPR/War Child workshop template into other engagement structures at the local level or those run by national and international organizations, but doing so will likely have staffing and budgetary implications.

The three-day UNU-CPR/War Child UK workshops combined a variety of engaging, child- and conflict-sensitive activities to try to better understand:

- what exiting armed groups meant in the local context to those who had lived it and to the communities that receive them;
- what doing well in their society means and how war-affected youth can achieve their goals;
- what the challenges and risks, as well as the sources of strength and support, are for those leaving armed groups;
- and how – if they were in charge – they would design and implement support for young people affected by conflict.

Engaging young people through these workshops not only as research subjects, but as research partners can be extremely valuable for all involved. UNU-CPR was able to derive research findings that informed their work on [Managing Exits from Armed Conflict \(MEAC\)](#). UNU-CPR was able to refine its approach to youth engagement processes around policy and programmatic questions. As importantly, the young people who participated in the workshops in Bossangoa and Paoua will be updated on the impact their involvement as these outputs are shared within the UN system so they will be able to see how their experiences and perspectives can inform policy and programming discussions and refine their own approaches to advocacy as a result.

THE WORKSHOP DESIGN AND SCRIPT

UNU-CPR and War Child are releasing the following participatory workshop design and script publicly to provide other researchers, practitioners and implementing partners a tool that they can adapt to their own work with young people. The session plan and script that follow are not perfect. Indeed, they are a work in progress, but they certainly provide a starting point for those looking to incorporate a participatory approach to their research, policy or programming work with children and youth.

CHILD PROTECTION AND RESEARCH ETHICS

It should be noted that this workshop script was designed to take advantage of War Child's VoiceMore programme infrastructure and more broadly, War Child's larger suite of programming in CAR. By doing so, the UNU-CPR/War Child participatory research workshops on reintegration were able to build upon the mutual trust and the culture of expression War Child had helped create with young people in Bossangoa and Paoua, which helped ensure the workshops produced interesting outputs to guide research and policy discussions. Most importantly, by working with the War Child programming infrastructure in CAR, the workshops took place in accordance with, and as part of an engagement culture that reflected child protection safeguarding best practices. This ensured that the workshops were child- and conflict-sensitive, based on informed consent, adhered to identity protection principles, and prioritized the safety of participants and their families.

The following workshop design and script would need to be employed with such key child protection tenets in mind. [War Child's Child Safeguarding Policy](#) can provide others who may wish to employ the prototyped workshop design and script in other contexts with guidance on how to do so safely and ethically. There are other good resources for guiding research engagement with children to ensure no harm is done, including UNICEF's *Ethical Research Involving Children*.⁸

CLOSING THE FEEDBACK LOOP

It is important for participatory research and engagement to close the 'feedback loop' to ensure that participants understand how the information they provided is used and that they are informed of any research findings. It is important for participants to be kept informed about the impact their discussions in Bossangoa and Paoua had on reintegration policy discussions at the UN and beyond. This type of feedback is meaningful and opportunities to provide it to participants should be built into any participatory research design.

⁸ See for Example, the Questions to Guide Ethical Research Involving Children section in A. Graham, M. Powell, N. Taylor, D. Anderson, & R. Fitzgerald, *Ethical Research Involving Children*, (Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, 2013) pp. 104-113.

Session Plan & Script:

Understanding Young People's Perspectives and Experiences Trying to Exit Armed Groups

OBJECTIVES

This session plan provides a guide for three days of activities to help researchers and practitioners learn from children and youth impacted by conflict and better understand:

- the main challenges to exiting armed groups (both for individuals and communities) and those factors that provide support and strength to those trying to do so
- ways in which the international community could help people who are trying to leave armed groups or have left and are struggling
- child and youth perspectives on useful programmatic interventions and the role they could possibly play in them

The goal is to have a helpful and healthy conversation where the participants feel comfortable sharing their honest opinions and for researchers and practitioners to share this information in a safe way.

DAY/TIME	PRE-SESSION OVERVIEW	TYPE	MATERIALS REQUIRED
A. PRE-SESSION INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT EXPLAIN TO THE GROUP			
DAY 0 60 minutes	<p>Explain to the group:</p> <p><i>We think it would be good to try to better understand what it's like to try to stay away from involvement in armed conflict – both for young people (15-24-year olds) and for communities. The international community tries to help people and communities who have been involved with armed groups and armed forces find non-violent ways to resolve conflict, but it is unclear if their support reflects the challenges that people face.</i></p> <p><i>The United Nations, also known as the 'UN', is an important organisation that makes decisions and recommends them to countries. The United Nations is considering how to improve the support they provide to those who have been involved in – or have been impacted by – conflict. We are asking for your time doing this workshop because we want to ensure that the United Nations considers real experiences of people living in places that have experienced war and conflict. We also want to ensure that young people are given an opportunity to have a say about the decisions made by an important organization like the United Nations.</i></p>	Plenary	

A. PRE-SESSION INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT EXPLAIN TO THE GROUP:

DAY 0
60 minutes

Activities:

We are asking if you are interested in spending a few days with us next week thinking about these issues and preparing feedback to help the United Nations in New York provide better support to people affected by wars and armed conflict.

[Provide a short overview of schedule/topics]

We will also create a short video that we will use to show decision-makers your thoughts and ideas. We might also use the video and pictures of the other materials you create on the internet. The people who will watch the video and see these materials live far away and many don't understand what young people and communities really need. This video and sharing these materials online provide an opportunity for you to send your messages directly to them as spokespersons.

*Does everyone understand the goals and schedule?
Does anyone have any questions?*

Consent

Consent means giving your permission and agreeing to do this activity. Please remember that you do not have to do this activity. Choosing not to do this activity will not in any way effect services you or your family get. It will not mean that you get any more or any less services. You are free to choose if you want to join this activity or not.

Remind the group that the discussion can only continue with their consent, by which we mean they must understand the request, be capable of making an informed decision, and that decision must be made voluntarily. Reiterate that:

- *If you change your mind at any time, you can withdraw your consent.*
- *We will shoot some video of the discussions that we'd like to use to explain to people who work at the United Nations what the group will do over the next few days, and communicate your perspectives, experiences, and suggestions to people at the United Nations. If we are not videoing, we might use a voice recorder to record your ideas instead. This helps us remember well what you have told us.*
- *You do not have to be on camera if you do not feel comfortable. You can still take part in the group discussions and activities and help create the recommendations we make, but you do not have to be on camera if you don't want to be.*
- *If you change your mind about being in the video now or later, you just need to let the facilitator know and she/he will tell the office.*
- *When the videos are ready the facilitator will make sure you all get the chance to see them. We will come back to you after we use the video to let you know how people reacted to them at the United Nations and discuss the impact of sharing your thoughts and feelings.*
- *We will never use someone's real name or information – even if you want us to! We will use fake names that you will chose.*
- *We also will not give any other personal information like where you live, who your family and friends are, what services you receive, or what school you go to.*

A. PRE-SESSION INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT EXPLAIN TO THE GROUP:

DAY 0
60 minutes

[Introduce your organization’s consent process, read the instructions to the participants, and ask if they have any questions. Once clarifications have been made, work with each participant (and their parents/care givers if relevant) to determine their capacity to give consent and, if appropriate, ask them if they give consent and sign consent forms.]

***Important* - Keeping Safe**

In addition to the above, explain to the group:

Because this video is going to talk about something more sensitive than the other videos, we are going to try and film feedback from some people without showing their faces. It is our policy that we do this. That means when we edit the video, we might just use your voices, or we will ask you to write your recommendations on cards or draw pictures or make other visual representations of your views/thoughts that we can film. We are going to film things a bit differently – and more creatively! – than other videos.

None of these choices were made because we think people should be ashamed of themselves or who they are. It’s just because whenever we make a video that will be on the internet and public (and it is about a topic that can be hard to speak about) we always do this to make sure that we protect people’s identities.

Check the group understands the reasons why we will film this video a bit differently. If anyone has any concerns make sure they can ask questions before you start the activity.

Remind of the following:

Confidentiality (Introduce your organization’s confidentiality policy or principles (e.g., respect other people’s privacy, don’t take information from the room to other places, etc.)

- Also remind the group they should **not** use specific names of people affected or implicated during discussions or on camera so that they can protect privacy.
- They also **do not** need to talk about what happened to them – this activity is not about recounting our personal stories of things that happened to us that were difficult.

They should **not** use names of any places when they speak so that they can protect privacy – for example they should not say where they live or any village names. They cannot say ‘here in Paoua...’ no names of places can be used.

It is very important to us that everyone is able to express themselves freely and as clearly as possible. All the materials we create will need to be translated into English for the people in New York who work at the United Nations to hear. This means that we can speak in the language that is most familiar to us, because it will need translated later, anyway. For this training we are asking that you speak in Sango because it is the easier language for everyone in the group to understand.

DAY/TIME	PRE-SESSION OVERVIEW	TYPE	MATERIALS REQUIRED
B. SESSION 1 - INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT REFRESHER			
DAY 1 30 minutes	<p><i>We are so pleased that you've joined us today to think about what it's like to try to stay away from being a part of armed groups – both for individuals and for communities. People who work on keeping people safe from war and conflict around the world will benefit greatly from hearing from people like you and learning from your thoughts and feelings about this topic.</i></p> <p><i>We have talked about the topics that we are going to discuss over the next few days and where this information, the things you discuss and make, and the video we are going to create, will be used.</i></p> <p><i>We thank you for joining us today and agreeing to work with us over the next few days to analyse some challenges and think through possible solutions to help people who are trying to improve their lives after war and conflict. If you've changed your mind about participating, please let us know. Otherwise, we will begin in a moment.</i></p> <p><i>If you change your mind about being in the video now or later, please inform the facilitator and she/he will tell the office. Remember, we will never use someone's real name or information – even if you want us to! We will be using the fake names that you chose. And it is our policy to film activities without focusing on people's faces or capturing any identifying information – like where you live, who your family and friends are, what school you go to etc.</i></p> <p><i>* When the videos and other materials are ready, the facilitator will make sure you get the chance to see them. We will come back to you after we use the video to let you how people who work at the United Nations reacted to them and tell you a little about how your sharing your thoughts and feelings also helped other people understand the situation facing young people here in Central African Republic.</i></p>	Plenary	NA

DAY/TIME	PRE-SESSION OVERVIEW	TYPE	MATERIALS REQUIRED
C. SESSION 2 - WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE/DO WELL?			
<p>DAY 1 75 minutes</p>	<p><i>Before we begin this first session, I'd like you to take a moment to think about how you would describe yourself. What five aspects of your identity are the most important to you? I've just handed everyone a card, please turn it to the side marked "Me" and write down the five aspects of your identity that are the most important to you. There are no right and wrong answers. Please do not write your name on the card.⁹</i></p> <p>[give them up to 5-10 minutes]</p> <p><i>Please flip the card over to the side with the "Others" on it. Now, let's think about if you met a stranger in the street. What five words might a stranger use to describe you? Please write them down.¹⁰ Again, there are no right and wrong answers.</i></p> <p><i>I'm going to collect the cards. There should be no identifying information on your card. We don't need to know who wrote these cards. We are simply interested to know a little bit about the differences between how you see yourself and how you think others see you.</i></p> <p><i>We'll come back to this issue later in the sessions, but let's begin to think about what it means to be/'do well' in your community, your society.</i></p> <p><i>If you had to describe to a person who is not from around here what the life of a person who is doing well in your community/society looks like, what would you say?</i></p> <p>Show the group the big stick figure on the board that you have prepared. Explain that they need to discuss their answers to the question and that we will add drawings / notes to the person to represent their answers.</p> <p><i>By filling in and adding details to this outline of a person, we will create a representation of what it means to do well in your community/society. Does anyone want to offer a suggestion for the first thing I should draw on this picture?</i></p> <p>[If the group are stuck explaining 'Doing well' not just about having lots of money or food, we want to know all the things that make a person well regarded in the community. How can you tell if someone is a 'good' member of the community?]</p> <p>[With each suggestion, the facilitator should ask the group if they agree. If there is general agreement, ask what we should draw on the stick figure to represent that attribute, then ask someone in the group to draw it (taking turns)]</p> <p>[60 minutes]</p> <p>[Please make sure to save the cards they hand in]</p>	<p>1) Short card writing exercise; and</p> <p>2) Stick figure "dressing" exercise and plenary discussion</p>	<p>1) Hand out index cards (with one side marked "Me" in the corner and the other side marked "Others" in the corner) and pens/pencils</p> <p>2) Large flip board with a stick figure on it. With each descriptor of doing well, dress up and customize the stick figure with items and symbols on the board (be conscious they could be gender specific and that would need to be noted or a female and a male version of the stick figure will need to be used).</p>

⁹ For children and youth who are not able - or confident in their ability - to write, an alternative approach should be employed. For example, when participants are asked this question, they could be requested to draw symbols to represent the aspects of their identity on their card and then discreetly meet one on one with the facilitator to explain their answers and have them labeled.

¹⁰ A similar approach could be taken as with above.

DAY 1

DAY 1 60 minutes	LUNCH
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D. SESSION 3 - WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SUCCESSFULLY LEAVE ARMED GROUPS? PART 1

DAY 1 60 minutes	<p><i>In this session, we will ask you to think about what life is like for children and young people who want to leave an armed group and do well in life.</i></p> <p><i>In this session, we are going to ask you to think about your own experiences, the experiences of your families, friends, and communities, and your knowledge of the war or conflict and armed groups fighting during. We want to understand your perspective, but please speak in generalities. By this, I mean that you do not have to say, "I had this experience," instead you can say "I know some young people have had this experience."</i></p> <p><i>What does it mean to leave an armed group, to leave armed groups?</i></p> <p><i>What's required for an individual to be considered successful or making progress in leaving an armed group?</i></p> <p><i>What types of things show us that a person has left their involvement in an armed group permanently?</i></p> <p>[If the group doesn't have answers, perhaps use a prompt: Is this about behaviour, meaning what we do and how we act (such as being a part of violence)? Is this our thoughts and feelings such as having support for an armed group or sharing in their beliefs and what they are trying to do? Is this about the personal networks they maintain meaning the people we spend time with and the friends we have? Is this only about how someone changes, or does it also have to do with how the community reacts to them too? – Does it matter how someone is received by their original community or their new one? What are the things that matter for how a community or a family treats someone after they leave an armed group?]</p> <p>[45-minute discussion]</p> <p><i>Let's come back together to hear about what each group discussed.</i></p> <p>[each group presents their summary points of what it means to successfully and permanently leave armed groups – 15 minutes]</p> <p>[Please make sure you record their answers with a voice recorder.]</p>	<p>Breakout Groups – Ex-CAAFAG and non-Ex-CAAFAG (discretely organized) and plenary report backs from each group</p>	<p>2 large flip boards</p>
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D. SESSION 4 - WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SUCCESSFULLY LEAVE ARMED GROUPS? PART 2

<p>DAY 1 60 minutes</p>	<p><i>In the last session, we discussed what you all thought would show others that a person has left all involvement in an armed group, and what it meant to break fully from an armed group in a way that was successful and permanent.</i></p> <p><i>You said [insert overview of consensus points from earlier session].</i></p> <p><i>In this session, we are going to think about if the community or society here would agree with your description of a successful, permanent exit from an armed group.</i></p> <p><i>We've written a list of the signs / attributes you put forward in the last session that you think show a person has successfully and permanently left an armed group.¹¹</i></p> <p><i>Now let's think about whether there are any members or groups in the community who might disagree with the list of signs/attributes you've put together.</i></p> <p><i>Are there other members or groups in the community who would disagree with one of the descriptions and would have a different or greater expectation of what it means successfully and permanently leave an armed group? What signs or actions do you think they look for to know if someone has permanently left an armed group? What else would they expect to see?</i></p> <p><i>We have a blank sheet we are going to put up next to your list marked "The Community Expects This".</i></p> <p><i>We're going to give everyone pens and we'll ask you to come up one by one and either 1. Draw an arrow towards the "The Community Expects This" board if you think that all the other members of the community would agree or 2. Draw an x if you think there are some members of the community who would disagree. Everyone here will vote on each of the signs/attributes</i></p> <p>[10 minutes]</p> <p><i>After everyone has a chance to share their thoughts, we'll go through each one and see if we need to change or improve the list for other people in the community.</i></p> <p>[20-minute plenary discussion going through each point – for those who put an "x", why don't you think the community would have this as something they would expect to see? Would they expect something different or something more? Let's see if others agree and we can add it to our "The Community Expects This" list]</p> <p><i>Now that we've heard everyone's thoughts and ideas, let's compare the two lists.</i></p> <p><i>What are some of the main differences?</i></p> <p><i>What do you think explains those differences?</i></p> <p><i>What challenges, or things that are difficult, could those differences create for young people trying to leave armed groups?</i></p> <p><i>Can anything be done to address these differences?</i></p> <p>[30 minutes]</p> <p>Make sure you save the flip charts and photograph them.</p>	<p>1) Voting exercise and</p> <p>2) Plenary discussion</p>	<p>2 large flip boards</p>
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¹¹ Another option when working with young people who cannot – or are not confident in their ability to – read is to have the facilitators draw symbols for each of the attributes on a board, and discuss what they represent as a group.

DAY/TIME	PRE-SESSION OVERVIEW	TYPE	MATERIALS REQUIRED
E. SESSION 5 – WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES TO LEAVING ARMED GROUPS/CONFLICT?			
<p>DAY 2 90 minutes</p>	<p><i>We are asking you to think about what life is like for children and young people who want to leave an armed group and do well. We are going to ask you to think of your own experience, the experience of your families, friends, and communities, and your knowledge of the conflict and armed groups fighting during this next session. We want to understand your perspective, but please speak in generalities. Remember, you don't have to say, "I had this experience," instead you can say things in a more general way like "I know some young people have had this experience."</i></p> <p><i>We are going to spend this session discussing what challenges children and youth who have been associated with an armed group face when they try to leave behind the war or conflict involvement and do well in life. We are also going to discuss potential sources of strength and opportunities that could help them in making these changes.</i></p> <p><i>We thought it would be good to take the thoughts and ideas you share with us in this session and represent them in a game. There is a game that was developed in India a long time ago that represents challenges and opportunities and the role of chance in doing well. Challenges and threats are represented by snakes and opportunities and strengths are represented by ladders to move up. The goal of the game is to reach the end. Each player takes a turn rolling the dice and advancing their piece along the board. If their piece lands on a square with a ladder they move up the ladder – closer to winning. If they land on a snake, their piece slides down the board, further away from winning. We thought this game might nicely represent what can happen to children and youth as they try to get away from armed groups – things that can help them leave and do well and all the things that can make that difficult or easier.</i></p> <p><i>Earlier we talked about what it meant to do well in your community. You said [insert short overview of their vision of doing well], right?</i></p> <p><i>Let's start by talking about the specific challenges or things that can be hard for children and youth who have been involved with an armed group face when they try to get away from conflict involvement and do well. What challenges and threats do children and youth leaving armed groups face? What makes it hard to leave?</i></p> <p>[plenary discussion, facilitator takes notes on white board for 20 minutes]</p> <p><i>Not all challenges or things that are hard are the same. Which ones are the greatest for children and young people to overcome as they try to live well? We only have 8 snakes to put on the board – what 8 challenges or threats are the most difficult for people leaving armed groups.</i></p> <p>[voting and labelling snakes 10 minutes]</p> <p><i>Now, let's shift our focus. We've been talking about things that make it difficult for children and youth leaving armed groups to do well. Are there things or people that can help children and youth leaving armed groups and support their making changes to have a different life?</i></p> <p>[20-minute plenary discussion with facilitator writing on the flip chart]</p>	<p>Plenary discussion and board game creation</p>	<p>Create a Board Game: Have a board with 100 squares and have 8 snakes and 8 ladders of various sizes. Plenary discussion about what are the biggest challenges that associated youth face after conflict involvement (label snakes) and biggest sources of strength/ opportunities available to them (label ladders). Have them place them on the board and play. Discussion of agency and chance – what young people can control and what they can't.</p>

E. SESSION 5 – WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES TO LEAVING ARMED GROUPS/CONFLICT?

<p>DAY 2 90 minutes</p>	<p><i>We only have 8 ladders to represent the sources of strength and opportunity we just discussed. Can we agree on which 8 are the most important?</i></p> <p>[10-minute voting discussion and labelling ladders]</p> <p><i>Now let's take our snakes and ladders and paste them on the board. Each end has to clearly align with a square. We'll take a quick picture of the board and then try playing the game to see what life is like for those trying to leave armed groups.</i></p> <p>[15 minutes]</p> <p><i>Before we close, we thought it might be important to reflect on the role of chance. In playing Snakes and Ladders just now, we saw how some players could slide back down through no fault of their own, just because of an unlucky role of their dice. Would you agree this represents how life can present us with unlucky situations that we can't avoid sometimes? Does anyone have any ideas or thoughts on the role of 'chance' in your life and how you can best respond in situations that are beyond your control? What would be the best way to deal with the 'snakes' if we land on them?</i></p> <p>[15-minute discussion] [Please make sure to save the game board]</p>		

<p>DAY 2 60 minutes</p>	<p>LUNCH</p>		
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F. SESSION 6 - SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING ARMED GROUPS

<p>DAY 2 75-90 minutes</p>	<p><i>We've thought a lot about challenges that children and youth leaving armed groups might encounter. Today we are going to discuss what could help those children and youth get away from armed groups and fighting.</i></p> <p><i>We are going to break into small groups and discuss what kind of support children and youth leaving armed groups might need at different stages of their leaving or getting away from war or conflict involvement. Then we will reconvene at the end of this session to discuss what each group decided. Each group will nominate a spokesperson to explain what they agreed on, if there were points where there wasn't agreement, etc.</i></p> <p>[divide into 4 randomly selected groups]</p> <p><i>Now that we've divided into groups, we are going to ask each of you to think about a particular stage in a young person's journey away from conflict involvement. One group will think about when a person wants to leave an armed group, but hasn't yet. The second group will think about the period of time right after the person leaves, but isn't settled and is likely in transition. The third group will think about those occasions when the person returns back to their community. And the fourth group will think about when the person settles in a new place, possibly where they don't know many people.</i></p>	<p>1) Breakout groups – small groups of 4 people each (with each focused on an exit stage), 2) timeline activity and 3) wrap up plenary discussion</p> <p>Group 1 – Trying to get out of the armed group Group 2 – Just after leaving the armed group (perhaps in transit) Group 3 – Once settled in their community of origin Group 4 – Once settled in a new place</p>	
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F. SESSION 6 - SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING ARMED GROUPS

<p>DAY 2 90 minutes</p>	<p><i>Now let's all come together to review what you've created and discuss the types of support each group identified for each part of an individual's transition away from armed conflict involvement.</i></p> <p>[30-minute plenary discussion – clarify what was put up on the timeline, discuss in plenary if others agree or if they'd add/modify what was placed, and then photograph the revised timeline]</p> <p>[Please make sure you save the timeline]</p>		
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DAY/TIME	PRE-SESSION OVERVIEW	TYPE	MATERIALS REQUIRED
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G. SESSION 7 - DESIGNING SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING ARMED GROUPS – PART 1

<p>DAY 3 90 minutes</p>	<p><i>Over the last few days, we've talked a lot about the experience of children and young people trying to leave armed groups. Today, we are actually going to try to help people in that situation, by taking all the good ideas that you've had over the last few days and using them to create what you think could be a good programme to support children and youth leaving an armed group.</i></p> <p><i>Today, I want you to imagine that you are all in charge of helping young people leave armed groups and support them as they build new lives for themselves. If the goal is to help them permanently leave an armed group, and do well in society, what type of support would you offer? How would you design your programme?</i></p> <p><i>What would you be sure to do? What would you be sure not to do? What do you think would be the most important?</i></p> <p><i>We encourage you to think creatively. This doesn't have to be a version of any of the programmes you already know about. It can be totally different and new.</i></p> <p><i>What kind of support would be necessary?</i></p> <p><i>What activities would be involved? Who would be eligible to participate/benefit?</i></p> <p><i>Who would run it?</i></p> <p><i>What role, if any, would families play? What things could a family do or not do would help the most? What things could a family do or not do would help the least?</i></p> <p><i>What role, if any, would the community play? What things could communities do or not do would help the most? What things could communities do or not do would help the least?</i></p> <p><i>What role, if any, would youth associations or groups play?</i></p> <p><i>Would things be different for girls and for boys? How?</i></p> <p><i>Would there be particular things that a program would need to do to consider the needs of girls? Please say more about that. Please give an example.</i></p> <p><i>Would there be particular things that a program would need to do to consider the needs of boys? Please say more about that. Please give an example.</i></p>	<p>Breakout groups – 2 mixed groups (randomly selected)</p>	<p>Flip charts (2 – 1 per group) along with other writing materials</p>
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G. SESSION 7 - DESIGNING SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING ARMED GROUPS – PART 1

<p>DAY 3 90 minutes</p>	<p><i>How long would good support need to take? What amount of time?</i></p> <p><i>What if you had limited resources, what support elements would you prioritize, meaning you would do them first? It will be important to remember that resources are limited, so the support will have to be realistic.</i></p> <p><i>What are the things outside of the control of the people offering or running the programme that might negatively affect it? What things, if any, could make it difficult for good programmes to help young people successful leave armed groups?</i></p> <p><i>How will we know if the support or programmes that were put in place were successful? From young peoples' perspectives what would show that a programme had worked?</i></p> <p><i>What would families or the community say? What would show them that a programme had worked?</i></p> <p><i>We will break into two groups, and you will design some type of support or programme for children and youth leaving armed groups. Please write up the basics of your design on a flip board. Then we will come back together for 30 minutes to present each group's idea.</i></p> <p><i>Please be sure to think about both boys and girls in doing this. Please also think about how, if at all, you will involve families and give some examples. Please also think about how, if at all, you will involve communities and give some examples.</i></p> <p>Please make sure to save any written materials (flip charts, etc).</p>		
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H. SESSION 8 - DESIGNING SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING ARMED GROUPS – PART 2

<p>DAY 3 60 minutes</p>	<p><i>Now we will ask each group to think about the plan that the other group created. Sometimes when we work really hard and closely on something, it can be difficult to appreciate the full value of what you've created or see the challenges that come with your ideas.</i></p> <p><i>We are going to use the fresh ideas of the other group to help us further strengthen each proposal. We'll switch proposals for 30 minutes of discussion, then we will bring the whole group back together so we can discuss how each plan can be made even better.</i></p> <p><i>In your group, discuss:</i></p> <p><i>What are the strengths of this approach?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any things or ideas that you think are missing?</i></p> <p><i>What is the biggest challenge (or challenges) or things that will be hard about each group's proposed approach?</i></p> <p><i>Is there anything that could be done to make these plans and ideas stronger and better? Please included any specific ideas that could help us deal with some of the challenges you described.</i></p> <p><i>Remember everyone here is trying their best and we want to support them. Let's work in a positive way to help each other.</i></p> <p>[30 minutes group discussions, followed by 30 minutes of plenary]</p>	<p>1) Critical Review Break-out groups (randomly assigned); and</p> <p>2) plenary discussion</p>	<p>2 Flip Charts, pads of paper and pens</p>
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DAY 3 60 minutes	LUNCH
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I. SESSION 9 - "THE FUTURE WE WANT TO SEE"

<p>DAY 3 90 minutes</p>	<p><i>We would like our last activity to be creative. In this activity we would like to ask you to decide on a way you want to answer the below question – you can create a song together, write a poem together, write a letter to the United Nations – anything you like! The United Nations is asking people all around the world to think about the world they want their children and their grandchildren to grow up in. We want to ensure your voices and opinions are included in this work.</i></p> <p><i>We want to write a song or a poem or letter or create a dance or drawing together on this topic, and if it comes together quickly, maybe even try to perform (or present) it during this session.</i></p> <p><i>We thought we'd start the song or poem or letter by describing the type of world we want for children, and their children.</i></p> <p><i>Let's take a few moments and think about how we'd describe the world we want them to inherit. This description could be beginning of the song or poem or letter etc.</i></p> <p>[30 minutes]</p> <p><i>Let's move on to thinking about how we can ensure the world will look this way in 25 years. What needs to change for us to achieve the life you've just described?</i></p> <p><i>How can we – and not just us in this room, but different societies, countries – work together to bring about this change?</i></p> <p><i>Let's take the next 30 minutes or so to try to compose the second part, which will focus on what we need to do to make this world you've described a reality for our descendants.</i></p> <p>[30 minutes]</p> <p><i>We don't have a lot of time, but let's see if we can finalize and deliver the poem/set the song to music/finalize the letter/finish the dance or drawing. Even if we don't finish the whole thing, we can try to present/perform bits of it.</i></p> <p>[30 minutes]</p> <p>[Please make sure to save any written documents – poems, letters, song sheet]</p>	<p>Song, poem, letter or dance composition and performance</p>
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J. SESSION, CLOSING, THANK YOU AND EVALUATION

<p>DAY 3 30 minutes</p>	<p><i>Before we close, we want to learn how to make discussions like this more useful.¹² How have you found the discussions and activities over the last few days? Was there anything you found good or difficult? Do you feel you learned anything from taking part?</i></p> <p><i>Please know that critical feedback helps us learn and improve these types of workshops for other young people. We will not be offended if you tell us you didn't like something, or you feel certain aspects of the workshop need improvement. Don't worry, what you share with us – good or bad – will not influence your future participation in these types of forums.</i></p> <p><i>Does anyone in the group have any questions they want to ask before finishing for the day? Is there anything you want to add or say that we did not ask you about?</i></p> <p><i>We want to thank you for taking the time to think through a really difficult problem that affects this region/country. It was great to learn from you, your thoughts and ideas, and your creative and collaborative approaches to finding solutions.</i></p> <p><i>It is so important that governments and organizations like the United Nations – far away from where we are today – hear from wonderful people like all of you.</i></p> <p><i>We will send back your proposals to the United Nations in New York and use the materials we created over the last few days to help advocate for having young people like you share their thoughts and feelings in plans about decision-making processes and for the consideration of the specific plans that you've put together today.</i></p> <p><i>We look forward to reporting back and sharing with you all how those ideas, thoughts, and materials were received in New York. We know it is important as advocates in training to understand what comes from your hard work. Knowing how you have helped influence policy discussions at the United Nations may help you become better advocates and spokespeople in your communities.</i></p>	<p>Plenary</p>	<p>Closing discussion, feedback, and review of next steps</p>
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¹² This approach may work well in environments where young people are comfortable providing critical feedback in front of other participants and/or facilitators. Where that culture and confidence does not exist (or if there are low levels of literacy and numeracy) it may be necessary to employ alternative approaches for gathering feedback. Some options to consider are allowing the participants to write or draw their feedback and submit it anonymously, or work on it as a group and submit a single amalgamated report (written or oral) to the facilitators.

NO RESEARCH ABOUT US WITHOUT US

THE COSTING OF PILOTING PARTICIPATORY POLICY
RESEARCH WORKSHOPS IN BOSSANGOA AND PAOUA (CAR)



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SUMMARY OF COSTING

In the fall of 2019, the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR) partnered with War Child to pilot a participatory research approach with war-affected children and youth in Central African Republic (CAR). UNU-CPR and War Child are sharing the workshop design and script as well as this costing to provide practical resources and tools to donors, UN actors, and implementing partners who might be interested in enhancing the participatory approach of the programmes they support or run.

The two workshops in CAR took place within the framework of War Child's VoiceMore Programme – a three-year advocacy training and mentorship programme – that War Child implemented in Bossangoa and Paoua in the summer of 2019. More broadly, the two workshops took place amidst the larger programming suite and culture that War Child has developed in CAR. By working through War Child's programming structure in CAR, the UNU-CPR/War Child workshop pilots were able to build on trusting relationships amongst participants, facilitators, and mentors and on the culture of engagement and expression that War Child had already cultivated. Moreover, the workshops were run within an infrastructure already built on child protection best practices for informed consent, privacy, and reducing security and stigmatization risks.

Without such a pre-existing engagement infrastructure it would have been difficult to create a workshop that was as mutually useful and one that mitigated possible harm to participants. Likewise, without a pre-existing forum for engaging young people the workshops would have cost more. For others seeking to do participatory research or engage young people as partners in programming, it is certainly possible to build the UNU-CPR/War Child workshop template into other engagement structures at the local level or those run by national and international organizations, but doing so will likely have staffing and budgetary implications.

The following costing includes the direct and indirect costs associated with running the workshops in two locations in CAR. Not all the detailed costs will be relevant to other contexts or other implementers (e.g., the videographer's time and travel if multi-media outputs are not needed). There were many staff hours in the development of the workshop design, translation, and related administrative work that are not included in Table I. There is also follow-up work to ensure that the workshop materials are photographed, translated, and analysed, all of which impacts staff bandwidth. Yet, it is UNU-CPR's and War Child's hope that by providing the workshop design and scripts – in two languages – organizations which seek to utilize them will not have to expend the same amount of resources to utilize or adapt the tools to their needs.

¹ War Child is an NGO focused on addressing children's pressing needs during conflict (and thereafter) – particularly with regard to their education, protection, and livelihoods.

Table 1

The Direct Costs of Running UNU-CPR/War Child's Participatory Research Workshop Pilots in Bossangoa and Paoua

	UNITS	FREQUENCY	TOTAL/ MONTHLY/ DAY COST	TOTAL (USD)
STAFF				
CAR VoiceMore Manager	1	0.3 months	631	189.30
CAR VoiceMore Assistant Bossangoa and Paoua	2	0.3 months	547	328.20
YOUTH FACILITATION SUPPORT				
Two VoiceMore youth facilitation support: stipend	2	8 days		560.00
RESEARCH AND COMMS WORKSHOPS				
Materials for workshop	2	2		200.00
Participant travel and loss of earnings	40	8 days	4	1280.00
Venue Hire	2	8 days	30	480.00
Food and refreshments	40	8 days	3	960.00
CONTENT CAPTURE				
Videographer fee: shoot and edit	1	1	3000	3000.00
Videographer Per Diem	1	10 days	35	350.00
Accommodation	1	9 nights	50	450.00
International Flights (Kenya - CAR)	1	1	800	800.00
NATIONAL TRAVEL				
Use of War Child vehicle - venue to accommodation	1	8 days	25	200.00
CAR Internal Flights Bangui - Bossangoa and Paoua	6	1	200	1200.00
TOTAL (USD)				9997.50



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