



Supporting Child-Focused Recovery

Helping children heal from conflict

Discussion Paper



Save the Children®

Supporting Child-Focused Recovery

Overview

Around the world, there are an estimated 142 million children living in high intensity conflict-affected areas.¹ These children are at risk of physical, emotional, and psychological harm that could shape the rest of their lives. To protect children from harm and enable them to heal from the impacts of war, it is critical for there to be both a common understanding of what child-focused recovery entails, and a strategy for implementation which includes both national level plans and global action. The World Bank has a particularly critical role to play in convening that process and galvanizing all those who have a role.

Why is child-focused recovery needed?

Terms such as ‘recovery’, ‘reconstruction’ and ‘rebuilding’ are regularly used in post-conflict settings, however they tend to suggest a return to the status quo before armed violence and there is no universally accepted definition on what these terms encompass and what child-focused recovery entails. The need however, is deeply pronounced.

Nearly 1 in 5 children worldwide are living in conflict-affected areas where displacement, death, and separation from loved ones are all too often unfortunate realities. As warfare has shifted to become more urbanized and involving more non-state actors, children have increasingly felt its impacts and experienced and witnessed grave violations including forced recruitment, killing and maiming, sexual and gender-based violence, and attacks on their schools and communities. Equally, as conflict becomes more protracted, the cumulative effect of fighting compounds harm to children. In Afghanistan for instance, the conflict marked its 18th anniversary this year. Every single child in Afghanistan has only known war and the impact it has on their education, safety, health and wellbeing.

Protecting children from harm: Conflict raises a host of child protection challenges. Some protection concerns are specific to times of

conflict, such as forced recruitment into armed forces and family separation, while others such as early marriage, sexual- and gender-based violence, trafficking, and child labour are heightened vulnerabilities that can be exacerbated by conflict but also present during times of peace. Protecting children from violence, abuse, and exploitation are perhaps among the most critical elements of children’s recovery. Despite this, child protection is substantially underfunded. In 2018, nearly 50 million children living in humanitarian settings were in need of protection services, yet funding for child protection only accounted for .5% of all humanitarian funding between 2010-2018.²

Healing through mental health and psychosocial support: Even after the physical wounds of war have begun to heal, the psychological impact can often be much more difficult to tackle. In many conflict-affected countries, mental health and psychosocial services were lacking even prior to the crisis and require significant development to meet the variety of children’s needs.

According to the World Health Organization, 17% of individuals living in post-conflict settings suffer from mild to moderate depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress (PTSD) and additionally, almost one in ten people experience severe levels of depression, anxiety, PTSD, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.³ This could mean that there are approximately 24 million children living in conflict today that could

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be experiencing high levels of stress and have mild to moderate mental health disorders and an additional 7 million children at risk of developing severe mental health disorders needing an appropriate level of support.⁴

Children are remarkably resilient and with the right support can recover from the harm inflicted by violent conflict and war. It is essential for mental health and psychosocial support to be adequately mainstreamed and prioritized to respond to the spectrum of children's needs and for donors to invest focused support for mental health and social care services at community and clinical levels. However, just as child protection overall is chronically underfunded, MHPSS programming constituted just 0.14% of all official development assistance between 2015-2017.⁵

Disrupted education: In times of war, children's education is often interrupted, due to insecurity and lack of financial resources, leaving them without critical support for learning, growth and stability. In 2017, there were 27 million children out of school in 24 conflict-affected countries.⁶ For children living as refugees, accessing education can be a major challenge due to psychosocial, language, economic, and social barriers.⁷ More than half of all school-aged refugee children do not attend school and girls living in countries affected by conflict are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys.⁸

In places like Syria and South Sudan, it is estimated that 1 in 3 schools were damaged, destroyed, or occupied during conflict.⁹ It will not only require investment to repair and rebuild education facilities, but also quality accelerated education programming that will help children whose education was disrupted catch up on learning. Equally important is donor support for the integration of children living as

refugees into the education systems of refugee hosting countries.

Health and nutrition: Hundreds of thousands of children die each year due to the in-direct effects of conflict.¹⁰ The knock-on effects of attacks on civilian objects can have a serious impact on children's access to services such as clean water, sanitation, markets and medical care leading to disease, malnutrition and hampering children's health and development. For example, between April 2015 – October 2018 over the civil war in Yemen, Save the Children found that nearly 85,000 children with severe acute malnutrition under the age of five years may have died.¹¹ Re-establishing community resiliency and access to basic services is critical to ensure that children can recover from highly vulnerable health and nutrition situation

While the immediate impact of conflict can have a devastating impact on children's lives, they will need much more care than any physical wounds to fully heal and recover.

What is child-focused recovery?

A common understanding of child-focused recovery is critical in order to ensure that there is a broad range of supports in place to support children's comprehensive needs. A broad definition of post-conflict reconstruction considers it as *"the process of rebuilding the country and achieving sustainable peace, in the context of security, political governance, socio-economic development, gender and justice"*.¹² Against this backdrop, recovery complements reconstruction and encompasses a *"broader approach involving communities and empowering them so that they can effectively deal with the post-crisis situation"*.¹³

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Save the Children proposes a definition of child-focused recovery as **a contextual process that aims to re-establish children's physical, cognitive, emotional, spiritual and social wellbeing using an inclusive, gender-sensitive, multi-layered, and multi-sectoral approach that is guided by children's participation.**

In its broadest sense, child-focused recovery from armed conflict aims to establish the conditions to improve children's wellbeing. It seeks to understand the impact that conflict has had on children's wellbeing and build improved systems. This goes beyond a return to pre-conflict conditions; child-focused recovery is also an opportunity to address and mitigate the impacts of violence, discrimination, and other harms experienced at any stage of a child's life, which are then often exacerbated by conflict. It recognizes that children of different ages, genders, ethnic origins, and abilities will require different approaches to meet their needs.

What is child-focused recovery linked to?

Children's recovery from conflict is inextricably linked to key international laws and norms, existing policy agendas, and the global targets that the international community have set out for themselves to achieve in development and under the grand bargain.

Convention on the Rights of the Child- CRC

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified treaty in the world, and unequivocal in its demands on governments to fulfil children's rights – including before, during and after conflict. These rights are both non-derogable and universal, compelling governments to prioritize children's recovery. Crucially, the CRC includes article 39 which states:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.¹⁴

Beyond article 39, the CRC includes rights pertaining to education, social protection, participation, best interest determinations, protection, separation, reunification, recruitment into armed groups, and exploitation and abuse. Using the holistic definition of recovery put forward by Save the Children there are multiple links to articles within the CRC. State parties to the CRC not only have a responsibility to guarantee the rights of children domestically, but should reflect these in their international funding priorities and policies.

Sustainable Development Goals- SDG's

The Sustainable Development Goals provides an additional framework requiring states to enable children's recovery and wellbeing. Children will only be able to recover from conflict if they have access to the right services, are supported with their physical and emotional health, are safe, and live in societies which provide them with the environment to achieve full fulfilment of their rights. It will not be possible to meet the SDG's and the pledge to leave no one behind contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development without enabling children's recovery from conflict.

Fragility, conflict and violence

Building peace, promoting development and prosperity, and responding to crises are features at the heart of the World Bank Group's (WBG) work on Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV). The WBG's upcoming institutional

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strategy on FCV will likely stand on the forefront of the policy agenda's set out above – focusing on the complementarity between the eradication of poverty, peacebuilding, development and humanitarian action – adding both finance and strategic direction in countries facing FCV. Crucially, the FCV strategy will include a focus on prevention and mitigating the impact of FCV on the most vulnerable groups. This must include children and their recovery from conflict.

When should child-focused recovery take place?

At the World Humanitarian Summit donors and agencies committed to better coordination of funding and operations across the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus – recognizing that each overlaps with the other and the reality of global crises. This is particularly relevant for children's recovery from the impact of armed conflict.

A focus on children's recovery should start during humanitarian response, within the post-emergency early-recovery phase. Any humanitarian response intervention that considers the child's medium and long-term recovery needs may be considered to bridge from response to recovery. It should be interwoven into initiatives aimed at stabilization and peace building, ensuring efforts are locally contextualized, influenced by a gender analyses, and that children's perspectives are taken into consideration in these processes. It should continue throughout the post-conflict transition and during the reconstruction phase. It is recognized that this process is rarely linear and usually cyclical in the context of modern armed conflict and varies across geographies within the broader conflict-affected area.

In order to truly enable children to recover from conflict, those responding must be able to meet

life-saving and humanitarian needs, alongside efforts which address systemic drivers and root causes through transformational change to support children across the nexus.

Which children require support to recover?

All children affected by conflict will require support to recover. Conflict impacts children differently according to their lived experiences, their individual vulnerabilities and resilience, and the ability of their families and communities to support them. Ensuring that all children are supported to recover from conflict involves understanding which children are most impacted and addressing their specific needs.

Consideration should be given to children from populations that have been targeted within the conflict because of geography, social group or gender, through siege, occupation or forced displacement. Within affected populations, children who have been specifically impacted will require targeted support to promote their recovery. These may include those who have suffered from physical injury and live with disabilities due to conflict, who have experienced the death of or separation from caregivers or suffered specific violations of their rights such as recruitment and use by armed actors, sexual violence or detention. It also includes those experiencing exploitation including child labor and sexual exploitation, as well as other forms of sexual and gender-based violence including early marriage. Many of these children will experience periods of acute distress that increase their vulnerability to violence, exclusion and exploitation and increase their risk of future mental health issues.

For some children, their experiences will have a profound and lasting impact, hindering their social reintegration and often leading to exclusion and impoverishment. Children

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associated with armed forces or armed groups, girls who have experienced conflict-related sexual violence and children who may have been conceived through sexual violence are particularly vulnerable to this.

It is critical that a gender lens is applied to ensure that the specific vulnerabilities and needs of boys, girls, and children of diverse gender identities are addressed to help them recover. Sexual- and gender-based violence and child marriage dramatically increase during times of conflict. Over 70% of women in crisis situations have experienced one or more types of SGBV compared with 35% of women globally.¹⁵ Early marriage increases the risk to girl's health and safety and limits their education. Up to 30% of girls who drop out of school do so because of child marriage and early pregnancy.¹⁶

How can we involve children?

Child participation is a critical tool for children to realize their rights. While children are hugely impacted by conflict and make up half of all refugees, their voices are often excluded from decisions that impact their wellbeing.

As children's recovery is considered, it is vital for they are consulted and empowered in civic and political discussions from community to national levels. And as localization progresses, strengthening the role and capacity of local partners to engage and empower children is key to ensure that their voices are elevated. They must be given access to public spaces where they can represent their needs in peace and transition processes and hold leaders to account if decisions are made or there is inaction that harms children's wellbeing.

What is the role of donors?

As outlined, there are multiple existing platforms at the global level such as the humanitarian-development nexus, the CRC and SDGs, upon which donors, states, and agencies should seek to build rather than replace. Children's recovery from conflict is intersectional – cutting across multiple themes and stakeholders.

Despite this, children's recovery from conflict is not, in its own right, a prioritized issue globally. While it is gaining more attention and traction, the lack of an approach for understanding and monitoring children's recovery and wellbeing and framework at the global level to ensure states are accountable for, and supported with, the achievement of conditions in which children can achieve a sense of wellbeing and recovery is a critical gap. Where we have time-bound aspirations on some global goals, we lack commitment, understanding, resources and ambition for children's recovery.

At the national level, many of the key components of children's recovery – including but not limited to education, mental health and psychosocial support, reintegration and family reunification, are visible within post-conflict reconstruction. However, too often these are not integrated, lack children's participation in policy processes, are under-resourced, not adequately gender sensitive, lack complementarity, and inconsistent. Where relevant, every country should have as part of its national development and crisis planning an explicit focus on children's recovery capturing the diversity of children and their unique needs. This could take the form of national action plans which:

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- Articulate children's vision for recovery;
- Outline the interventions required to achieve that vision, including the resources required;
- Map existing activity which is complementary to, or overlaps with, children's recovery;
- Explain how national humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts incorporate a child focus; and
- Set measurable, time-bound ambitions for achieving changes required to enable children's recovery from conflict.

Save the Children believes that the World Bank has an important role to play as a convener, through various fora, of UN agencies, donors, governments, NGOs and the private sector. Children's recovery and wellbeing will only be achieved through partnership and collective action – grounded locally but supported by the international community. We believe that the

following steps are necessary for progress, and that the World Bank has a critical role in each:

1. Define – global recognition of the problem, commitment to respond, and agreement of a common definition of children's recovery.
2. Plan to act – outline and commit to a global agenda for action. Who will respond, how will they respond, and by when?
3. Develop – working in a small number of relevant countries, develop national recovery plans. Simultaneously translating the first two steps into a specific, measurable framework for global action.
4. Implement – secure resources for implementation of national action plans, to consolidate learning at the global level, and to build capacity, workforce, expertise and relevant delivery architecture working with humanitarian and development sectors and national governments.

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