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## **YOUTH AND CONFLICT**

### **A Brief Review of Available Literature**

By Marc Sommers  
Youth Research Specialist  
EQUIP 3/Youth Trust  
Email: [msommers@bu.edu](mailto:msommers@bu.edu)

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## **Executive Summary**

Youth engulfed by conflict and post-conflict situations face circumstances that substantially alter their lives and prospects. This makes effective programming for them challenging yet vital. Drawing on extensive archival and internet research, this short analytical literature review aims to illuminate key themes, trends, and promising prospects for war-affected youth and the programs that aim to assist them.

The review will introduce debates over how the youth category has been defined and whether youth should be seen primarily as passive victims of warfare, active threats to peace, or as resilient survivors. Analysis suggests that while war's effects on youth are complex, resilience is their most prominent shared characteristic. The implication of this analysis on programming is significant because it casts youth as central formulators of youth programming.

Analysis in the subsequent discussion of programmatic responses reveals several widely shared program themes related to class, gender, advocacy, participation, work, and holism. It also reviews the six main program areas emerging from the literature: vocational training, reproductive health, basic skills, peace education, empowerment, and psycho-social programming.

With an eye to enhancing programming, the document recommends:

1. Significantly expanding the participation of female and lower-class youth in program development. The general inattention to these issues is thoroughly alarming.
2. Immediately addressing the startling scarcity of quality evaluation documents.
3. Dramatically enhancing and disseminating documentation of:
  - a. Program approaches that can yield lasting positive results;
  - b. Strategic planning, coordination and networking; and
  - c. The context of youth programming, including the role that international agencies play in war and post-war economies.
4. Highlighting youth resilience and consistently demonstrating effective partnerships with youth in programming.
5. More effectively positioning programs where youth increasingly reside (such as in cities).
6. Seriously exploring possibilities for expanding youth access to capital.
7. Upgrading the overall quality of youth program documentation, and youth empowerment programs in particular.

## **I. Introduction**

In one of the massive Rwandan refugee camps in Tanzania in August 1994, a weekly international humanitarian agency meeting focused on refugee youth. Hundreds of thousands of Rwandans fleeing genocide and civil war four months earlier generated an enormous humanitarian crisis that had overwhelmed relief agencies. During this period, increasing numbers of male youth were reportedly being recruited into militias while sexual and other forms of violence rose. Up to that time, no programs or material of any kind – not even a football or a volleyball – had been provided for youth.<sup>1</sup>

While a response surfaced soon after that meeting (in the form of sports competitions), the episode underscores the distance that youth in conflict and post-conflict programming has traversed in the past eleven years. Yet while progress has taken place, the field remains new. Much still needs to be learned, adapted, and evaluated. Assumptions about youth and how to best support them continue to call for evaluation. New information about successes and challenges require enhanced dissemination.

None of this is unique to an emerging field of endeavor. What remains lacking is a general sense of the current body of knowledge and experience on youth programming in conflict and post-conflict settings, and the directions that promise to yield particularly productive results. Drawing on extensive archival and internet research,<sup>2</sup> this short paper aims to illuminate key themes, trends, and promising prospects.<sup>3</sup> It will not address the specific issues of child and youth soldier disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) activities, those specifically targeting disabled children and youth, how to incorporate youth into existing sectoral programs, or formal education programming. Instead, it will more broadly concentrate on issues and programs relating to war-affected female and male youth.

The paper will conclude with a series of findings that highlight prominent programming strengths and deficiencies, and offering recommendations for next steps.

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed in Sommers 2001a: 18. It was also pointed out that religious groups were sponsoring most of the organized youth activities in the refugee camps.

<sup>2</sup> Special thanks are due to Molly Sampson for developing the Supplementary Bibliography, which forms the foundation of this literature review. Ms. Sampson is an English teacher at Inlingua Language Services in Arlington, Virginia, and a graduate student in the master's of public anthropology at American University. She is also a former Youth Trust Intern.

<sup>3</sup> One of the few previous attempts to address this literature, although exclusively regarding Africa, is "What Happens to Youth During and After Wars? A Preliminary Review of Literature on Africa and an Assessment of the Debate" by K. Peters, P. Richards, and K. Vlassenroot (2003). Reviews are contained in other youth and conflict sources, such as Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (USAID) 2005, Ebata et al. 2005 (for UNDP), Lowicki and Pillsbury 2000 (for the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children), and Sommers 2001a (for Save the Children US).

## **II. Context: Definitions, Debates and Potentials**

### ***What Does 'Youth' Mean?***

A persistent challenge confronting work with youth is defining who they are. In the West, and among international agencies, there is a strong tendency to use an age range to determine the youth category. There are at least four problems with this common approach.

First, the age ranges continue to differ. A common range is 15-24, which is advocated by UNICEF and others. There tend to be slight variations among international agencies, such as Save the Children's age range of 13 to 25 (Sommers 2001a: 3). At the same time, an age range reportedly developed by African personnel for a Lutheran World Federation youth program in Kenya's Kakuma Refugee Camps was 7 and 40 (Ibid.).

Second, youth definitions straddle the much more common age-based definitions of child and adult. A widely-accepted separation point in the West, and in United Nations definitions of childhood, is a person's 18th birthday, when one is thought to move directly from the status of child or "minor" (ages 0-17) directly to adult (ages 18 and above) or young adult.

Third, concepts of youth, adolescence, and even what constitutes young people vary. An adolescent is generally thought to be a subset of the youth category. A World Health Organization official described the overlapping complications with the following description: "Adolescents are 10-19 years old; youth are 15-24; and young people are 10-24 years old" (Lowicki and Pillsbury 2000: 10).<sup>4</sup>

Fourth, definitions of youth are further confused by the fact that in many parts of the world youth may not be determined by age. "Youthhood" is frequently considered a time of passage between childhood and adulthood, or as "biological markers, in which youth is the period between puberty and parenthood" (Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation 2005: 3). In some cultures, male and female initiation rites mark the passage. But in others, females are only considered "youth" before marriage, an event that in some cultures can occur at an early age, since they may marry and have children soon after reaching puberty, thus becoming categorized very early in life as young adults and no longer youth or even children (Newman 2005: 11, Sommers 2001a: 3-4). In places such as Darfur, the concept of youth or adolescence as a stage of development is unknown. "Females are considered girls until they menstruate, at which point they become women" (Heninger and McKenna 2005: 1). Motherhood tends to change the social status of female youth far more than fatherhood alters male youth lives.

This is no small distinction. The fact that female youth as a category in many cultures scarcely exists, if at all, constitutes a serious and direct challenge to everyone engaged in youth programming. Nowhere has an adequate response been adequately formulated.

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<sup>4</sup> These appear to be fairly standard UN agency definitions, as suggested by Bethke and Braunschweig (2004: 4).

Still other distinctions exist. For example, a veteran researcher reported that a person may be considered a youth in Sierra Leone until his or her father died.<sup>5</sup> As a result of all of this confusion, youth, de Waal observes, “is therefore a problematic, intermediary and ambivalent category, chiefly defined by what it is not: youths are not dependent children, but neither are they independent, socially responsible adults” (2002: 15).

An implication of this confusion surrounding the definition of youth is that youth lack specified rights in part because it is not entirely clear who they are. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) declares that children (that is, all people under age 18) have a variety of rights. Since the youth category contains both older children and younger adults, a counterpart international mechanism has proven much more difficult to develop.

### ***Are Youth Victims or Threats?***

The literature on youth contains a fundamental contradiction. Youth are most commonly depicted as either passive victims of trauma or active security threats.

These separate depictions have separate origins. The most renowned description of how war traumatizes children (which includes adolescents or those at the lower end of the youth category) is Graça Machel’s landmark 1996 submission to the UN General Assembly, the Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. The report describes the ruinous effects of war on all children. Machel has since conducted a follow-up study, which reasserts that “Children spared the direct experience of violence in armed conflict still suffer deep emotional distress.” All children, she added, “who have lived through conflict need psychosocial support” (2001: 80).

Machel’s work illuminates what Eyber and Ager consider “a dominant trend” that emphasizes child and youth “vulnerability rather than resilience.” While not denying war’s negative effects on young people, they argue that Western conceptions of childhood tend to regard children as “vulnerable, passive beings who need to be protected and cared for” instead of active community members (2004: 189). They further argue that popular conceptions of trauma stem from the creation of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a psychiatric diagnosis of American veterans of the Vietnam War. Trauma as conceived in the West may strongly contrast with understandings of distress surfacing in non-Western cultures (e.g., Honwana 1998, Wessells 1999, in Eyber and Ager 2004: 190).

Popular depictions of (male) youth as security threats also arise, for the most part, from Western sources. Robert D. Kaplan has famously characterized male youth in urban West Africa as “out of school, unemployed, loose molecules in an unstable social fluid that threatened to ignite” (1996: 16). Such menacing descriptions were supported by Samuel P. Huntington’s argument that societies are particularly vulnerable to war when people aged 15-24 (that is, youth) comprise at least 20% of the population (1996: 259-261). His

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<sup>5</sup> Private interview.

thesis illustrated the demographic dangers created by ‘youth bulges,’ defined as “extraordinarily large youth cohorts relative to the adult population” (Urdal 2004: 1).

According to this view of young people, male youth may not be the only ones to fear. Hendrixson highlights “The counterpart to the image of the aggressively heterosexual angry young man”, which is the “passive, veiled young woman, whose presence accentuates the implied violence and menace” of all youth (2004: 10). The author argues that the “passive young woman” image “lumps together Southern and Muslim women into a single figure hidden behind a veil interpreted as a sign of ‘women’s unfreedom’” (Ibid.). As depicted by adherents of the youth bulge “threat,” female youth are menacing because they are, effectively, the principal source of the youth bulge. Hendrixson argues that viewing female youth “mainly as potential mothers... reinforces the notion that young Southern women’s fertility is responsible for population growth – and, more specifically, for the rise in numbers of young male terrorists” (Ibid.: 11).

The belief that youth bulges directly cause violent conflict, global insecurity, and terrorism has attracted a high degree of attention since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S. (Ian Bannon, in Urdal 2004). Urdal’s statistical analysis neither supported Huntington’s argument regarding a 20% threshold (Ibid.: 11) nor Kaplan’s argument that the world is “moving toward a new age of insecurity” (Ibid.: 16). Instead, it depicted high numbers of youth as a “blessing and a curse.” A large youth population can “boost an economy” (Ibid.). But poorly performing economies and weak governance, when mixed with a youth bulge in the population, may lead to violence.<sup>6</sup> Urdal also found that “autocratic governance acts to reduce the risk of conflict,” as in some Middle Eastern countries, even when economic stagnation and youth bulges coincide (Ibid.: 17).<sup>7</sup>

In terms of programming, fearing male and female youth becomes an end in itself; a barrier against carrying out programs to assist them. Such fear does not inspire people to try to understand and work with youth. Instead, it encourages the idea that people must protect themselves against young people.

This is a preposterous contention. During periods of war or peace, youth are not inherently dangerous. A recent study, for example, indicates that adolescent males with high levels of testosterone in their blood are easily influenced by peers. If their peers are involved in delinquent behavior, they are likely to copy it. But if they associate instead with peers engaged in positive behavior, they are likely to become leaders. Testosterone in early adolescent males was found to be “related to leadership rather than to antisocial behavior in boys who definitely did not have deviant peers” (Rowe et al. 2004: 550). It would seem to be fairly obvious that ignoring, isolating or denigrating young people is unlikely to yield positive results. Evidently, it isn’t.

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<sup>6</sup> According to Urdal, the countries “assumed to be under a particular risk of experiencing armed conflict, due to accumulation of the risk factors of youth bulges, intermediary political regimes and negative or stagnant economic growth are Zambia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Yemen, Niger, Togo, Iran and Jordan” (2004: 17).

<sup>7</sup> “Thus,” Urdal concludes, “paradoxically, a partial and gradual process toward democracy may substantially increase the risk of conflict in the Arab world” (2004: 17).

### ***Recognizing Youth Resilience***

Increasingly, simplistic characterizations of war-affected children and youth as either traumatized victims of, or violent contributors to, warfare are being confronted by research suggesting that war's impact on youth is complex. It is also challenged by the fact that child and youth soldiers include increasing numbers of girls and female youth. One cannot presume the gender of young warriors in modern warfare. This trend notwithstanding, female child and youth soldiers remain virtually invisible to international agencies, a trend that has been documented and depicted in mostly harrowing terms (e.g., McKay and Mazurana 2004, Nordstrom 1999, Verhey 2004).

Additionally, recent research indicates that child and youth experiences of warfare are far more varied than had previously been assumed. The experience of child soldiering most certainly damages young people, as the work of Machel and others suggest. Yet some studies indicate that the experience may not be entirely damaging for some young people. Boothby et al. have found that "former child soldiers who are provided rehabilitative services and accepted back into their families and communities will become productive, responsible and caring adults" (2005: 1). Brett and Specht find that some war-affected youth choose to join military groups because the family either expects military service from children (especially sons) or the lack of a family makes military service more attractive. Young people who "have to find something to do" because they lack viable education or employment options may become soldiers. Poverty and peer group pressure are additional motivations for enlistment (2004: 126, 127). Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot contend that a great many young people in civil wars such as Sierra Leone and Mozambique were not abducted or forced to fight but elected to do so for reasons that they imply are fairly reasonable. Citing work by researchers such as Schafer (2001), they assert that some young people may view soldiering as a means of survival, joining a movement, and seeking less arduous work (2003: 14). To some degree, some youth appear to have profited from the experience of soldiering.

This view has been critiqued (e.g., Wessells 2002), and runs the risk of underplaying the prodigious damages of warfare on children and youth, as highlighted in an array of literature (e.g., Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2001, Singer 2005). In addition to soldiering, it is indeed well worth contemplating the multitude of ways that children and youth are exploited by their commanders: as porters, domestics, sex slaves, spies, human shields, minesweepers, miners, military policemen, and suicide bombers (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2001: 23-24, Sommers 2002: 5).

Nonetheless, youth are increasingly viewed less as damaged victims than as fairly adept actors in difficult war and post-war realities. No finding supports this view more directly than the growing body of research on child and youth resilience.<sup>8</sup> This finding is somewhat counterintuitive because war destroys lives and livelihoods and alters just

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<sup>8</sup> A concise catalog of the resilience of *some* (but not all) young people is found in Apfel and Simon, including their ability to attract and use adult support, their curiosity and intellectual agility, their vision of possibility, and a need and ability to help others (1996: 9-11).

about everything in its path. Boyden and de Berry's edited volume is devoted to "shifting the paradigm" away from "accepted wisdom" about war's punishing effects on young people to argue that "age is not necessarily the critical determinant of vulnerability." "Even when confronting by appalling adversities," Boyden and de Berry explain, many youth "are able to influence positively their own fate and that of others who depend on them" (2004: xvi, xix, xvii). Part of the authors' critique is that "Too often programmes for war-affected children are dictated by adults' perceptions of the impact of war on young people." Accordingly, programs must start with "children's and young people's definitions of constraints and opportunities" when policies and programmes are developed for them (Ibid.: xix). This paradigm shift is a critical departure point for youth programming because it casts young people as core formulators of their own assistance.

Findings about connections between youth resilience and programming is supported by growing calls to view young people in war and post-war situations as primary economic and social resources (e.g., Argenti 2002, de Waal 2002, Ebata et al. 2005, Kemper 2005, Lowicki and Pillsbury, 2000, Newman 2005, Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation 2005, Sommers 2006, Thorup and Kinkade 2005). This is a challenge in many quarters because heavy youth involvement in conflicts expands civilian fears of youth as menacing destabilizers. But almost by default, those involved in youth programming are increasingly recognizing that youth must be engaged as primary building blocks for peaceful futures. There are so many youth in war-affected areas, and so many caught up in activities directly related to war. Ignoring youth might lead some towards the gangs, militias, prostitution and drug rings, and other groups who have proven many times over just how effective young people can be in the service of war and exploitation. Engaging youth, in other words, appears to have surfaced as a humanitarian and post-war necessity because there really is no alternative.

The lack of engagement with most youth threatens to strengthen the feelings of many youth that they are ignorable castaways. This is particularly the case for female youth, whose plight is frequently overlooked within their societies and beyond, who often live much less public lives than their male counterparts, and who do not inspire the degree of fear that male youth do. Thus, while male youth attract attention (even if much of it is negative), female youth, for the most part, generally do not (Hendrixson 2004, Sommers 2006). The alarming trend towards the institutional invisibility for women, including female youth, is underscored by the ILO: "Though gender considerations are increasingly being adopted in development contexts, they remain largely absent from practice in emergency and relief operations" (1998: 2).

### ***War's Many Impacts on Youth Lives***

While debates persist about war-affected youth as victims, threats, resilient survivors, or resources (or, much more likely, some combination of these and other characteristics), certain facts about youth and war are both significant and widely accepted. The expansion of child-based warfare across the globe has increasingly brought young people into an unfortunate spotlight. At the same time, while the 1990s experienced a dramatic expansion of civil wars across the globe, many have since ended.<sup>9</sup> An estimated 84 percent of all casualties of recent wars are civilians (Date-Bah 2003: 5). Many more deaths occur from the collateral effects of warfare – such as famine, disease, and the destruction of health services – than actual fighting (Humphreys 2002: 9, cited in Date-Bah 2003: 7). Armed conflicts are one of the central factors driving the expansion of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which disproportionately attacks youth and significantly decreases the ability of households to cope with crises (Date-Bah 2003: 8-9). The tendency for youth to flock to cities during and after wars is an increasingly significant phenomenon (Peters et al. 2003, Sommers 2003a).

### **III. Programmatic Responses**

Two poignant facts inform the field of youth in the conflict and post-conflict programming field: there are huge numbers of youth directly affected by war and relatively few programmatic responses that are widely known, evaluated, and available. With this in mind, it is hardly surprising to discover that generality is the predominant characteristic of the literature on this issue. As a field still evolving and finding its footing, the literature remains short on demonstrable, how-to specifics. Evaluative materials and information is another striking shortcoming. In short, there is much more information about what should be done than on how to do it.

This section reflects this tendency. It will first review five central themes that emerge from the literature addressing youth in conflict and post-conflict programming in general terms. It will then turn to the six primary program areas that have been reasonably well documented. These are: vocational training, psycho-social (or trauma) approaches, basic or life skills, reproductive health (for female youth), peace education (including conflict resolution training), and youth empowerment.

The field's general hesitance to lend youth capital (literature on microcredit schemes is remarkably thin) or work in urban areas, where so many youth are located, is suggested by their virtual absence from the literature. These and other potentially promising issues will thus not be reviewed here.

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<sup>9</sup> The list is long, and includes: Angola, Bosnia, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, East Timor/Timor Leste, El Salvador, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Guatemala, Kosovo, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Southern Sudan.

### ***Five Prominent Program Themes***

An increasing number of documents about programming for youth in conflict and post-conflict situations are emerging from key donor and implementing agencies. The following themes, trends and principles have been drawn from a selection of recent publications.

#### *Which Youth? Class and Gender Challenges:*

In moving from platitudes about the need to work with youth to the how-to of programming, differentiations between youth by social status, location, and gender are often lost. The marginalization of many youth is a theme advanced by some authors (e.g., Ebata et al. 2005, Sommers 2001a). Accordingly, there are calls for program goals to “include integrating at-risk youth into society,” such as by the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (2005: 13). At the same time, strategic discussions of whether and how programs should consider class differences between youth appears to be rarely addressed. The shift of large numbers of youth to urban areas once wars begin is frequently overlooked as well, and mainly with reference to Africa (e.g., Peters et al. 2003, Sommers 2001b, 2003a).

The general inattention to gender issues is even more striking. Indeed, it is thoroughly alarming, and not only because female youth – that is, roughly half of all youth – are regularly overlooked or even ignored. It is also that their particular plight, concerns and perspectives are not often incorporated into programming. Gazing at youth and conflict programming, one would be pressed to appreciate that the colossal numbers and needs of female youth are even close to the center of the endeavor.

Some recent literature describes the substantial threats and dangers facing female youth during and after wars and their near-exclusion from many programs. Nordstrom states that girls in war zones “are actors in the drama and tragedy of war along with adults” and not, as their plight is frequently depicted, mere casualties who “do not act” (1999: 6-7). She detects a punishing prejudice in the international development world favoring the perspectives and agendas of boys, and argues that “The lack of political, economic and educational development for girls is a symptom of many societies’ failure... to see women as political, economic or educated actors.” This attitude, Nordstrom states, “pervades the core ethos of many development organizations” (Ibid.: 44-45). Mazurana et al. similarly note how, despite the pervasive use of girls in fighting forces in wars across the world, “girls continue to be marginalized in programs for child soldiers at both national and community levels” (2002: 119).

Girls may even be marginalized within their own communities and families during wars. Swaine and Feeny, for example, note that many Kosovar families used early marriage as a strategy to protect girls against rape and sexual assault. Yet the researchers found that early marriage only “exacerbated [the girls’] pain and anguish.” Given the chance, Kosovar female youth “would choose employment over marriage” and “full involvement in family and community decisions” as post-conflict strategies (2004: 83, 84). Those who undertook such efforts struggled because they confronted cultural and social norms

dictating a subordinate and mostly silent role for them. “Resilience in the context of war,” the authors note, “often carries a high price” (Ibid.: 83).

*The Need to Advocate:*

More than a billion people are between the ages of 15 and 24; almost a fifth of the world’s population. 85% of them reside in the developing world, where nearly all of the world’s current conflicts take place. Almost half of the world’s unemployed are youth (Ebata et. al. 2005: 4). Nearly half of all new HIV infections occur among youth. There are approximately 300,000 child soldiers in the world today, most of whom are adolescents (UNICEF 2002a: 5).

For some reason, such daunting statistics have yet to spur anywhere near an adequate response to many of the most vulnerable youth: the war-affected. A wide array of authors continues to make the case for providing programming to them. There is an insistent, even defensive posture in much of this writing, and an implication that many in influential international agencies remain hesitant to embrace the challenge of providing effective youth programming. Many writers are thus essentially writing advocacy documents, arguing that investing youth programming is worthwhile. In this, one continues to sense the powerful influence of Kaplan, Huntington and others promoting the idea that youth threaten societies (even while, in demographic terms, they constitute a significant demographic proportion of them).

Efforts are thus made to reverse a tendency to seek protection from youth rather than providing them with protection and other forms of assistance. Reflective of this is a UNICEF document which reviews a sampling of its programs for adolescents and argues that they “all show that adolescents are a resource to their communities” (2002b: v). Again, such a statement might appear obvious, but for many, evidently, it is not.

A significant but underutilized advocacy argument is highlighted by another UNICEF document about adolescents. The argument is neurobiological. Recent research, the document states, has found that beginning at about age 11 in all humans there is “an explosion of electrical and physiological activity” which dramatically reorganizes “billions of neural networks that affect emotional skills and physical and mental abilities” (UNICEF 2002a: 6). The prefrontal cortex (just behind the forehead) is a location for particularly significant development. It “acts as a commander-in-chief, responsible for planning, organization, judgment, problem solving and emotional control.” While the brain undergoes this seminal period of ‘reorganization’ between the years of 11 and 18, it is unusually vulnerable. Threats embodied by major negative events like “trauma, abuse, neglect and excessive use of drugs and alcohol” – all of which may easily emerge to an extreme degree during warfare – can “change the circuitry of the brain,” scramble the brain’s “architecture and chemistry,” “significantly and negatively affect brain functioning and learning capacity,” and “ultimately limit an adolescent’s future choices and opportunities” (Ibid: 7).

Some documents incorporate perceptions of threatening youth into their arguments. Ebata et al., for example, urge that youth programming should not “unintentionally reflect a fear

of youth” (2005: 7). Peters et al. observe that even though “All African countries face a demographically driven ‘youth crisis’, ...not all have experienced civil wars” (2003: 9).

This accurate assessment conflicts with the predictive arguments of Kaplan and those highlighting connections between youth bulges and warfare. The converse may also be true. A central reason why youth in conflict zones face such difficulties, Mayer and Salih note, is because “different parties involved in the conflict tend to perceive and treat all youth as a major potential threat” even if they weren’t participants. Accordingly, youth “must be seen as a critical target group” in order to “achieve sustained progress towards peace and the end of armed conflict” (2003: 226).

*Participation:*

Youth often feel (and frequently are) marginalized or excluded from peace-building and reconstruction activities. A strong sense of social distance is a central theme in descriptions of youth during and after conflicts. The central irony surrounding those entering African cities, for example, has been cited as follows: “they are a demographic majority that sees itself as an outcast minority” (Sommers 2003a: 1). Newman suggests that the “most sinister effect of modern civil wars” may be “the damage they wreak upon young people’s social worlds.” The author further asserts that “young people often have extremely limited social networks exclusive of anyone beyond immediate family members” (2005: 19).

With this as the background, calls for encouraging the direct and explicit participation in youth program design and management are widespread. In practice, however, it remains a novel approach. Lowicki, for example, notes that youth in three war-affected countries (Kosovo, northern Uganda, and Sierra Leone) who were invited to lead research and advocacy work on youth concerns “were mainly astounded to be asked to take control of a project focused on their concerns as defined by them.” This was because youth “uniformly revealed severely limited opportunities for their participation in decision-making processes dominated by adults” (2002: 33).

To engage youth and help them feel empowered, many authors argue that youth need to be included in program development. Ebata et al. argue that since youth “are forced prematurely into adult roles and responsibility through war, social upheaval and increasingly with the HIV/AIDS crisis,” maximum effectiveness for youth programming can only be achieved if they are empowered as program decision-makers. Newman asserts that the effective protection strategies that youth have developed for themselves, documented in research in Uganda, Palestine and Kosovo where some female youth resisted, negotiated, and controlled threats of sexual violence (2005: 24), need to be understood, since youth participation “markedly improves the quality of protection interventions” (Ibid.: 30). Newman, in fact, argues that “the fundamental challenge before the humanitarian community is to involve young people in the active exploitation of those resources which provide them safety amidst the chaos of war” (Ibid.: 32).

Notwithstanding the significance of youth participation, Hart provides a word of caution. Drawing from work with war-affected youth in Sri Lanka, he notes that giving youth the

responsibility of running youth activities “does not mean reduced workload and costs for agencies.” But he also stresses that youth participation promises to give youth the capacity to protect and support themselves, and give them “confidence to deal with the many challenges of life” in a post-war world (2002: 38,39).

Work:

The fact that many if not most war-affected youth either need a means to generate an income or a pathway towards employment is a persistent theme. This is partly a product of how war forces many youth to assume adult responsibilities at an early age, including having to provide for themselves and others. Work is also connected to personal empowerment and self-esteem.

Such concerns surface in different ways. Peters et al. advocate for allowing free movement within Africa’s labor markets and into EU countries as a way to resolve what they characterize as “the violent youth crisis in Africa” (2003: 41). Others stick much closer to home. Richards et al. calls for support for rural Liberian youth so they can more easily seek self-employment with improved access to markets, training and credit (2004: 53). Honwana finds that, while traditional Angolan methods provide a degree of psychosocial and emotional relief in war-affected children and youth, they must be “complemented by job creation and skills training programs as well as a general alleviation of poverty” (1998: 12). Ebata et al. note that youth unemployment is “largely seen as a security issue, rather than a development objective.” Most programs available to them unfortunately focus on preparing them for jobs in the formal sector through training, even though formal economic sectors typically constitute a fraction of all economic activity in most war-affected countries (2005: 122).

Holism:

Calls for holistic approaches to programming for youth in war and post-war situations are widespread. The Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, for example, argues that programming must be multi-faceted to address the diverse needs of youth. They endorse programming that provides job training, job creation, political participation, sports and recreation, leadership and health training, and, in high-risk situations, conflict resolution (2005: 14). Others suggest slightly different combinations of components. Lowicki and Pillsbury, for example, notes that while “health is the most developed and coordinated sector of international response to adolescents affected by armed conflict,” physical protection, formal and non-formal education, and livelihood training require extensive support (2000: 8-9). All, however, endorse integrating some sort of education and training aimed at protecting and empowering young people.

***Six Primary Program Areas***

A problem in reviewing separate program areas is that they frequently overlap: a vocational training program, for example, may also provide basic skills training. Similarly, a basic skills training program may also have peace education or vocational components.

With this in mind, the following section reviews youth and conflict literature that features one of six program areas: vocational training, reproductive health, basic skills training, peace education, youth empowerment, and psycho-social programming.

*Vocational Training:*

One of the central tragedies of warfare, as Achio and Specht note, is that youth not only “have to face the everyday crisis situation; he/she must also compromise the future.” “War,” the authors continue, “destroys not only the economic fabric of a society, but also the social services that are crucial for the youngster when he/she is constructing the basis for his/her whole further adult life” (2003: 155). For many, education tragically becomes an unattainable luxury while income generation attains a towering significance largely powered by sheer necessity.

Vocational education programming, in other words, promises to address what is arguably the core need of most war-affected youth: survival. What follows is a consideration of some of the central concerns raised in the vocational training literature. As the literature is considerable, so is the following description, which is divided into four prominent themes:

*Gender* – Following a workshop presentation on vocational training for war-affected youth, a question was asked of the presenter: what about the participation of female youth in the program? In fact, the presenter admitted that he had not considered that issue. It turned out that the overwhelming majority of youth involved in the vocational program under review were male.

Gender dynamics play a central factor in war and post-war vocational programs because male and female youth generally play different economic and social roles. Female youth may be burdened with domestic responsibilities (including childcare), have generally lower levels of education, have limited access to work, fewer opportunities to earn much income from their work – and may be distinctly unable to regularly participate in vocational or other programming.

The literature strongly suggests that the field has yet to effectively and consistently address the vocational needs of female youth through programming. Given its significance, it is a colossal gap in the programming for war-affected youth field. Regularly highlighted as a significant problem, effective solutions, particularly tested ones, are scarcely even mentioned. What is clear is that traditional vocational training programs do not often work for most female youth and childcare is required to even be able to include many of them in regular programming (Sesnan et al. 2002: 34). Not mentioned is the fact that traditional vocational courses tend to be both gender-specific (for males: trades such as carpentry and masonry; for females: hairdressing, and, only in some contexts, tailoring) and the trades for female youth generally have a much lower earning potential than those reserved for male youth.

In response, a detailed booklet containing guidelines for addressing women’s needs [including, by implication, female youth] in conflict-affected countries (from the

International Labour Office, of the International Labour Organization) contains a number of highly useful suggestions. These include the need to use: gender analysis, relevant statistics disaggregated by gender, and participatory methods during program planning stages to “help to bring out the distinct impacts of conflict on women and men” (1998: xi); integrating programs along gender lines to avoid “reinforcing assumptions of women’s vulnerability and victimization” and “creating gender conflict and competition”; and extending “knowledge of ‘female responsibilities’ to men” during training programs. The guidelines suggest that the needs of young and older women are diverse, and require substantial attention and investment (Ibid.: xii, xiv).

*Holism* – There is broad acceptance that traditional vocational programming approaches are insufficient for war-affected youth. A useful overview of the need for a broad based, practical approach is provided by Sesnan et. al. Their approach includes: a market assessment conducted with youth, business training for youth aiming to be self-employed, and connecting vocational training to apprenticeship schemes (with the warning that “agencies should ensure that young [apprentices] are being taught and not simply exploited” (Ibid.: 34)).

One sees in this and other publications the need to appreciate and address the dual options for youth of self-employment (as entrepreneurs) as well as working for others (often starting as apprentices). That said, Muhumuza notes in an assessment of ILO programming in Uganda that there was a shortage of jobs for vocational program graduates, and “even youth with skills often have no place to work” (1997: 30).

Sesnan et al. also stress the need to teach youth basic education and life skills. In the list of possible subjects that they supply, one begins to appreciate the wide range of needs of most war-affected youth: “reading, writing, numeracy, science, artistic expression and handicrafts, landmine awareness, HIV/AIDS awareness, gender-based violence, environmental protection, civic responsibility, human rights, resolving conflicts, personal hygiene, safety and good parenting” (Ibid.). Lyby’s consideration of vocational education for refugee youth signals the importance to occupy those “who otherwise have very little to do” (2001: 247). He recommends internet cafés and sports clubs.

*Location* – Given the mobility of youth affected by wars, it is striking how little this issue is addressed. One of the few publications to address this is ARC et al. Addressing youth challenges in Sierra Leone, the authors note that many of the country’s ex-combatant youth, and those who worked in support of combatants, “will not return to their villages because they have either been exposed to the modern life that the urban centers represent or they fear retribution” if they return to their home villages in rural areas. They also note that many are “idle” in Sierra Leone’s major towns and cities, and have not yet become “economically engaged with livelihood activities that are sustainable” (ARC et al. 2004: 2, 3). Unlike the other programs reviewed, the program incorporates “socially marginalized youth” into a economic development program aimed at adults (Ibid.: 8). Since this economic development program does not also incorporate training and education for such disadvantaged young people, it is difficult to grasp how their economic and social integration might succeed in a lasting way.

*Planning* – The need to carefully plan vocational programs was highlighted in some of the literature. In his evaluation of ILO’s skills and entrepreneurship training in Mozambique, Maslen finds that “Perhaps the single most important lesson... is the need to plan adequately on the basis of [an] appropriate needs assessment.” Assessments, he continues, “should comprise [a] socio-anthropological study of intended beneficiaries and a labor market survey, including identification of actual or potential employers.” It should also include an “assessment of the target beneficiaries” both in terms of individuals and their communities, with special attention paid to “the special needs of potentially vulnerable groups, including youth as a whole and women and the disabled in particular” (1997: 4).

Maslen also urges that program planning “should be the basis of all interventions” and should not be neglected “in the rush to ‘do something’” (Ibid.: 5).

*Reproductive Health Programming:*

Programming for reproductive health may be the only approach that specifically targets female youth. Given the inherent need for reproductive health services, a significant portion of program development is needed in this field.

Short internal evaluations of two reproductive health programs shed light on innovative ways of providing essential reproductive health information, assistance and support to female youth. The models are well worth noting. One is called the Health of Adolescent Refugees Project (HARP), piloted by the Family Health International NGO (FHI) and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), and funded by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The model featured first establishing Girl Guide groups among refugee communities in Egypt, Uganda, and Zambia. Led by refugee women, the groups tested a new health education curriculum and established a peer education program for adolescent girls. Girl Guide association members in the three countries provided in-service teacher training. The program pilot was small: there were 10 groups of approximately 30 adolescent refugee girls involved, for a total of 900 girls reached in total. The program hoped that each trained Girl Guide would speak to another 25 girls who were not involved in the training.

The evaluation explored whether and how the program achieved its implementation objectives. Among the evaluator’s findings was that “it was easy to see that participating in this project had changed the lives of girls in all three countries” in positive ways (Tiedemann 2000: 6), such as raising self-esteem and expanding the girls’ knowledge of reproductive health. Tiedemann further found that some of the program’s leaders and trainers “insisted that they should be paid for their participation”; a common request among participants of international agency programming. HARP officials declined to do this on the basis that Girl Guiding “is and always has been a voluntary activity and there was no intention of ever paying a stipend” (Ibid.: 11).

Another significant challenge concerned the program’s target group. The evaluator explains that although HARP “was envisioned as a program with potential for reaching

out-of-school girls, the way the curriculum and materials were designed made it very difficult to attract this target group” (Ibid.: 13). One of the evaluator’s recommendations addresses this problem: “If a commitment is made to include out-of-school girls, then materials should be adapted for girls who cannot read” (Ibid.: 16). Indeed, the evaluator contended that the materials were too advanced even for many of those who could read.

The second reproductive health initiative, also aimed at adolescent refugee girls, is led and administered by the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children. Called the Reproductive Health Project, it is essentially a grant making fund that supported 12 local NGOs in 8 countries with refugee populations. Most of the projects are located in Africa and Asia. Most NGOs involved in the program provided reproductive health training and education. Other initiatives included training adolescent girls as reproductive health peer educators, providing sanitary wear materials, condom distribution, and, for a relative few, providing formal educational support and income-generating skills training.

The most significant lesson learned from this project, as documented by Ritsema, is both vague and potentially very useful: that “perhaps the most effective model to use in advancing conflict-affected adolescents’ [reproductive health needs] is that which is contextually designed to meet the specific, pressing needs of the adolescents in each community” (2003: 11).

*Basic Skills Training:*

Basic skills training is a popular non-formal education approach for youth in conflict and post conflict settings. It generally aims to address some of the most pressing needs of out-of-school youth through training. Programs generally integrate a range of subjects into a stand-alone, classroom-based format. The sub-field has many other titles as well, including life skills and human rights training.

Here, two large-scale programs will be briefly contrasted to illuminate this kind of programming. “Youth Education Pack” of the Norwegian Refugee Council, and the “Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace Program (YRTEP)” of the Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID), together with World Vision and Management Systems International (MSI) – had notable similarities. Both last up to a year, train 20-25 youth at a time in gender-balanced classroom settings, targeted youth with limited or no education, and found through evaluations that their programs were popular in the communities where they took place and were considered reasonably successful.

At the same time, both programs also had difficulty teaching trainees how to read and write. This can partly be seen as a downside of an integrated education approach: literacy training takes time, and both programs were intent on incorporating a host of other topics into their respective curricula.

While the “Youth Education Pack” incorporates literacy, life skills and vocational training in one package, Midttun consistently found that youth participants considered vocational skills training as the most important component. The program has taken place

in Rwanda and Sierra Leone (Midttun and Skjetne 2004, Midttun 2005). YRTEP, which concluded in Sierra Leone in 2004, covered many more subjects than Youth Education Pack: psychosocial and vocational counseling, literacy, life skills, agricultural skills training, and peace education. It was able to start quickly and eventually involve a large number of youth (45,000) with cost-effective methods (the program cost per participant was USD \$150). At the same time, its connections to work or follow-up programming for youth graduates were weak (Hansen et. al. 2002, Sommers 2003b).

*Peace Education:*

A 2001 review of peace education programs for refugee and other war-affected populations found that many programs targeted people who were already peaceful. Youth, particularly those who are not in school, are highly vulnerable to being victimized by and involved in violence. Yet they are not often targeted for peace education and related programming (Sommers 2001c).

A fairly mainstream peace education approach was introduced in Montenegro for children and adolescents in their primary schools for residents, IDPs, and refugees. The program was led by the international NGO, World Vision, with support from UNICEF. Significantly, the pilot curriculum was “initiated and written” by a Community Services Manager for World Vision and a psychologist consultant from UNICEF’s local office. The program’s goal was to “promote peace and understanding among elementary school children throughout Montenegro.” The program’s objectives focused not on what students would learn but what their teachers would teach them, such as strategies to enhance cooperation and collaboration, promote good communication and listening skills, reinforce positive affirmation for all students and appreciate diversity (Slobig 2001: 11).

The evaluation and follow-up section illustrates a weakness with many youth programs that are represented in the literature: a scarcity of thoroughgoing program evaluations. For example, with reference to the program’s goal, it is not clear the extent to which conflict and its effects plagued the school-age children and adolescents before the program got underway. Nor is it suggested how much students retained from the curriculum, much less whether the skills they learned had a positive (or negative) impact in the lives of themselves and others.

Instead, the evaluation featured classroom evaluation forms filled out by students (largely about what they thought of the learning environment and process) and feedback from teachers. Most students enjoyed the curriculum. Teachers recommended additional training, redesigning the curriculum “to meet time and space constraints in the classroom” and financial compensation for teaching an additional curriculum in school (Ibid.: 12). Whether the program served to promote peace and understanding, particularly in a lasting way, is not at all clear.

One program that has been extensively evaluated and reviewed is UNHCR’s Peace Education Program.<sup>10</sup> The series of evaluations and reviews, and the frequent revision of

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Obura 2002, Robinson 2000, and Sommers 2001c.

the program as it developed, appears to have nurtured a lack of internal complacency about the program and its impact. Illustrative of this is an article from one of the program's main founders and developers. The author, Pamala Baxter, describes the program and some of the elemental challenges it faces. It is comprised of a primary school component containing fourteen concept areas and gauged to be used as a separate subject in all grades. The counterpart community component consists of 10 to 12 workshops and follow-up meetings for adults (including youth). Baxter explained that both the school and community components "are interactive and activity-oriented so that participants have a chance to internalize the necessary attitudes" (2001: 29).

Since the program aims to change the behavior of participants, the author frankly admits that the program is not successful for everyone, that community leaders "do not always pass on what they have learned" to others, that training programs tend to train the very same refugees, over and over again, and that wartime leaders "do not have the same power and authority" over others as they did in pre-war times (Ibid.). Youth are represented in the community program, and adolescents constitute the core audience of the upper grades in the school component.

Baxter also notes that non-refugee humanitarian workers "have a tendency to think for the refugees and so we do not listen effectively, we do not communicate clearly and we 'pass' on the problem rather than working through to a solution" (Ibid.: 30). Humanitarian workers, in other words, do not always demonstrate the core concepts and themes that their programs emphasize when interacting with refugees.

McKee describes an unusually innovative peace education program approach in Northern Ireland. In what he describes as "A program of work for adolescents living in conflict situations", McKee divided the program into three components and states that it pertains to settings involving ethnic conflict. Unlike the two approaches suggested above, McKee does not teach peace education as much as engage young participants in acts of conflict resolution and reconciliation.

The first component in McKee's approach is "Single identity work." This entails gathering children and youth to raise their group consciousness "about their own culture and confidence in that culture. Groups from each side of the ethnic divide thus separately explore their own group's "perceptions and myths." The second component involves bringing the opposing groups together. This presents a strong challenge to the program because "no matter how much preparation has taken place hurts, fears and misperceptions still occur and are likely to be close to the surface of awareness with individuals" (2000: 87). Through what he calls "non-contentious activities," children and youth from ethnic groups in conflict that they share "much the same fears, hopes, goals, aspirations and life difficulties as their counterparts in a different culture." It is this realization that "causes relationships within the groups to realign, with new bonded relationships across cultural divides. The final component is called "In-depth conflict transformation group work", which McKee says is "more suitable for older teenagers." This component involves trying to understand the conflict process and "the pain of living in conflict" (Ibid.). McKee warns that program officers "need to be well trained and also need to have

examined their own prejudices and, as much as possible, need to have ‘freed’ themselves in order to be open in the practice situation” (Ibid.: 88). This is somewhat risky but potentially rewarding work.

*Youth Empowerment Efforts:*

– This program area may be the hardest to categorize. It concerns activities aimed at energizing and engaging youth through largely sporadic, high-profile public activities (such as sports competitions, concerts, or conferences), or, alternatively, through the engagement of existing youth groups. Sometimes programs incorporate both possibilities.

One needs to tread carefully through such documentation, because the claimed positive impact is widespread while evidence is generally hard to come by. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) program description, for example, delivers sparse information about a promising initiative involving networking Kosovo youth groups, establishing connections between youth and government structures, and supporting existing youth centers. But nowhere is it indicated which youth are involved, nor how many, leaving the impression that much of the youth involved are elite, or at least reasonably educated, youth, most of whom, it might be assumed, are male youth.

Another example of this trend is the Youth Project of Search for Common Ground’s Youth Project in Burundi. The project features sponsoring “peace concerts” and football matches with building a youth center, conflict resolution training in schools, an activity engaging “young people to work for peace in their communities”, peace camps for children (involving 300 children of different activities in conflict resolution activities), and a clearing house to promote donor agency support for local youth associations (Abdalla et al. 2002: 129). Unfortunately, the evaluation is actually much more a description of activities than an evaluation of impact. As with UNDP’s many youth-related activities in Kosovo, Search for Common Ground in Burundi is clearly involved in an exciting array of activities. But it is neither clear which youth are being engaged nor whether lasting positive impact has been generated.

Thorup provides an instructive review of youth activities in the Balkans concerning the development of tolerance. The review is part of the “What Works” series produced by the International Youth Foundation and the Balkan Children and Youth Foundation (in cooperation with USAID). Since the geographic and program coverage is broad, one program will be briefly considered here. It concerns support for an active network of youth in Kosovo (and beyond) called the Prishtina Post Pessimists. While the PostPessimists intentionally “do not directly tackle issues related to tolerance and conflict” (2003: 18), they engage youth on both sides of the Kosovar Albanian-Kosovac Serb divide. They have sponsored an art workshop and exhibit, organized dialogues involving Albanians and Serbs (and in concert with their Belgrade PostPessimist counterparts), surveyed youth views of conflict in the public schools, and many other activities.

The publication is descriptive and not evaluative, and while it is not clear which youth are involved (and which are not), the activities described are both diverse and impressive.

Among the lessons that Thorup shares are the need for flexibility when working with youth, and that some youth prefer to work on issues of conflict and discrimination through indirect means. She also recommends, among other things, the utility of bringing youth from different sides of a conflict “outside of their own setting or even their own country” to provide them with “the opportunity to be exposed to new ideas far away from the pressure of peer groups and parents” (Ibid.: 43).

*Psycho-Social Programming:*

– Literature on psycho-social programming is entangled in the debate, reviewed earlier, about the relevance and applicability of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) across cultures. One review of psycho-social programming, for example, comments that many employ assessment tools which “are based on Western psychological paradigms and often involve a diagnosis of PTSD” (Armstrong 2000: 3). Armstrong also finds that there is a debate about the best way to intervene in the lives of children. While many clinicians assert that “all children who have experienced trauma will need therapy in order to deal with their feelings and learn to cope with the future”, they are basing their view on “western models of psychology” which “may be inappropriate in other cultural settings” (Ibid.: 10).

The focus on whether a young person who has experienced significant or severe psychological impact from war should be called ‘traumatized’ or not appears to be somewhat of a diversion. However such stress is labeled – and the terminology can be confusing – there is broad acceptance that it exists. What would appear to matter much more is not what it is called but what is done about it.

Regardless of cultural concerns, in war-ravaged places, the lack of Western-trained mental health professionals makes program development featuring clinical treatment largely untenable. Perhaps fortunately (since such individual-focused programs approaches are rarely even possible in war situations, when populations are generally large and funds are short), Armstrong argues that “a community-based approach to psychosocial rehabilitation will be more feasible and appropriate” (Ibid.: 11).

It is a stance that finds considerable support in the literature on psycho-social programming for the war-affected, including youth. The documentation on psycho-social programming for youth is primarily community-based, and can be divided into the following four general approaches.

The first might be termed those who address psychological stress head on. One such approach is art therapy, which Baráth strongly endorses: “wide-band, public health oriented art therapy prevention programs beg for global implementation, especially in countries hit by civil disturbances and/or by war, because they have the potential of helping young victims in a creative and meaningful way” (2003: 166). Drawing from research in the former Yugoslavia, the author reviews a host of art therapy intervention programs that feature training “paraprofessional helpers and volunteers” (Ibid.: 156) that aim to mobilize communities to help young people in distress. Baráth argues that such “organized art activities with children” may be both “therapeutically valid and socially

acceptable” in communities and with young people – and can be put into operation “even at times of acute military operations” (Ibid.: 168).

A second general approach combines a Western-led approach with non-Western techniques. Wessells and Monteiro outline one approach in Angola. After stating that since “counseling and Western psychological interventions have no cultural basis in Angolan society,” Wessells and Monteiro observe that “outsider interventions [too often] simply collapse when the period of funding has ended” (2003: 181). In response, Wessells and Monteiro describe a Christian Children’s Fund (CCF) program approach that viewed psycho-social healing and adjustment “not as a one-way transfer of knowledge and skills but as an opportunity for mutual learning” (Ibid.). One feature of CCF’s program was the building of a jango, “an open community hut where meetings could occur in a manner that honored the ancestors believed to be the foundation for the living community.” Partnering with local traditional healers, and CCF’s respect for local traditions, beliefs and practices, Wessells and Monteiro asserted, “Had enormous value in boosting the self-esteem of people who during the colonial era had internalized a sense of inferiority about their own culture and doubted their ability to construct a positive future” (Ibid.).

Another version of this second approach is suggested, in general terms, by Boothby. After noting that “Western-trained mental health professionals... have nowhere else to start other than the presumed universal responses to stress” (1996: 251), he emphasizes the prominence of cultural relevance. Western treatments tend to “focus on [trauma] symptoms such as nightmares, sleep disorders, or startle reactions” and may include medication. However, this sort of focus may overlook or even prolong other important trauma symptoms such as “avoidance, shame, and decreased involvement with other people” (Ibid.). He also suggests that other issues, such as malnutrition and the loss of relatives, belongings and homes, can delay personal and physical development and exacerbate traumatic stress.

Boothby endorses what he terms a “two-dimensional model that considers the context of the crisis itself and children’s coping in relation to that context” at the same time (Ibid.: 255). This approach would take into account such issues as whether the local government is an oppressor (if so, Boothby asserts that “psychosocial programs need to be deinstitutionalized”) (Ibid.: 252). He also warns that “If [local] culture is not taken into account, mental health responses will not focus on meaning” (Ibid.: 251).

Many, if not most of the intervention-based programs generally retain roots in Western cultural approaches, as the two psycho-social programming approaches illustrate. International agencies based in the West do not often integrate traditional approaches (including the employment of healers; a common therapeutic approach in a great many war-affected communities outside of the West) into their programming, as Wessells and Monteiro describe above.

This tension between Western and non-Western approaches is a significant concern because they may operate in opposing ways. Green and Honwana, for example, describe

a traditional healing ritual for a former child soldier in Mozambique that, unlike Western approaches aimed at unearthing traumatic memories, instead seeks to bury them. The healing ritual, they explain, “brings together a series of symbolic meanings aimed at cutting a child’s link with the past (the war). While modern psychotherapeutic practices emphasize verbal exteriorization of the affliction, here through symbolic meanings the past is locked away”(1999: 3).

The third programming approach, as described by Green and Honwana, does not try to link Western and non-Western approaches to treating psychological stress. Instead, it implies that the two are fundamentally at odds. Green and Honwana stress that traditional healing rituals work because: they “are instrumental in building family cohesion and solidarity, and in dealing with the psychosocial and emotional side” of young people’s problems. The authors thus propose a programming intervention solution that complements ritual healing rites with “community development programs to sustain the gains achieved in the psychosocial and emotional sphere” through healing rituals (Ibid.: 4).

While this third programming approach endorses the provision of community development programs to support entirely local and traditional psycho-social approaches, the fourth programming approach proposes to address psycho-social stress among war-affected young people primarily with community development efforts. Connections to actual psycho-social treatment are indirect. A Save the Children Working Group on Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement, for example, endorses, among other things, strengthening community support for the creation of a sense of normality in young people’s lives (including family routines and organized educational activities) and vocational and skills training. The latter activity is deemed necessary because “Psychosocial well-being and competence to satisfy material needs are inter-related” (Save the Children Working Group on Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement 1996: 5).

#### **IV. Looking Ahead: Findings and Recommendations**

The review of literature on programming for youth in conflict and post-conflict settings reveals a series of promising trends and unfortunate deficits. It also takes place amidst a truly encouraging expansion of awareness about and investment in war-affected youth needs and concerns.

Across the landscape of literature on this field, certain issues surfaced as prominent concerns, including the significance of participatory, holistic programming and the particular importance of vocational training. As this piece is written with an eye towards improving the availability of effective programming for war-affected youth, the following concluding comments call particular attention to what is needed much more than what has already been accomplished.

This should not at all be construed as a criticism of those already engaged in programming for youth in conflict or post-conflict situations. The emerging field will naturally develop strengths and weaknesses as it matures. There are shining exceptions to many of the statements mentioned below.

##### ***Primary Findings***

The purpose here is merely to shed light on issues that call for increased attention and provide general recommendations for future action as this vital field moves forward. The nine primary findings are:

1. The literature's strength still lies in its advocacy for recognizing and supporting youth. Its primary limitation is its general shortage of proven techniques that promise to generate lasting, positive results for youth.

This needed shift from the general to the specific will promote the still-new field's growth. With this in mind, programs that yield proven, positive, and lasting impacts should be highlighted and considered for adaptation elsewhere.

2. A significant weakness in the literature is the scarcity of quality evaluation documents. Relatively few program evaluations exist. Evidence of lasting program impact on youth lives is virtually unknown. Most (but not all) of the evaluation documents reviewed are not of high quality, and do not, for example, examine the lives of program graduates after programs have ended. Many also do not critically compare the situation of program participants to their counterparts who did not participate in programs. Indeed, profiles of which youth are in and not in a program is often either unclear or not mentioned. It is frequently difficult to determine the gender, class, educational accomplishment, war experience, household stability, and ethnicity of youth in these two groups.

The collective and regrettable result is that it is still mostly unclear what particular program approaches work or do not work.

3. The literature remains thin on considerations of strategic planning. The combination of enormous numbers the war-affected youth population and funding limitations calls for frank considerations of which youth should receive top priority as program targets. Such planning calls for careful analysis of the social and economic roles that different youth play, as well as coordination and networking involving government and non-government, local, national and international, and secular and religious actors – essential related issues that the literature has yet to effectively address.
4. There remains an alarming tendency to provide assistance to more male youth than female youth. The result sometimes looks a great deal like exclusion, and unfortunately implies that some male youth matter more to government and international agency programmers than female and less fortunate male youth do.

This may not be the intention. But if efforts are not made to include equal numbers of female youth, and then respond to their particular, and unusually pressing, protection and assistance concerns, the results of too many programs is too often predictable: they will attract more favored male youth, often far more, than female youth. This is a tragic consequence that is both avoidable – and, indeed, inexcusable.

5. A related concern is whether higher class (and mostly male) youth with fewer immediate needs nonetheless form the dominant corps of program participants when other, much less fortunate youth are left out. It is difficult to avoid the sense that some of this may be done, even if unconsciously, because better adjusted youth tend to be easier to work with and promise to enhance prospects for program success.
6. The literature does not adequately address the location and mobility of war-affected youth. While large numbers are flocking to urban areas, most youth programming does not appear to be aimed in their direction. Instead, many of the programs reviewed suggest a rural and camp orientation.
7. Despite consistent advocacy for a featured youth role in programming, many youth programs still do not effectively demonstrate this. Indeed, there are signs that some agencies developing programs for youth focus on what they are prepared to provide rather than what youth need or want most. This is a disturbing trend that promises to yield negative results. The leap towards positioning youth much more prominently as program designers and participants is a leap that many programs have evidently not yet made. Doing so may be new and awkward.

But youth directly impacted by warfare frequently emerge as a different caliber of young person. Many youth survivors are forced to discover and develop survival

strategies that are tested under often extreme conditions. They may also be spouses, parents, and former combatants. Such experiences can turn even the youngest and most uneducated adolescent youth into remarkably adept survivor experts.

Partnering with such war-affected youth in non-patronizing ways appears to have received, in some quarters, much more comment than concerted action. But it is a core element of effective programming for youth in conflict and post-conflict situations.

A prominent example of the tendency to avoid such engagement with youth lies in a widely mentioned priority for war-affected youth, vocational training. Most youth need work or a means for survival. Yet how program developers have come up with their menu of program offerings is frequently unclear. There is often no evidence of quality needs assessments prior to program implementation. Accordingly, neither the market niche that trained youth will fit nor the aspirations of youth themselves are identified.

In addition, since so many youth are engaged in entrepreneurial activities, the near-absence of micro-credit programming for war-affected youth is both notable and unfortunate.

8. War-ravaged economies often leave government institutions depleted of funding and capacity. Markets for jobs that vocational programs train youth to perform are often irrelevant, unless, perhaps, the graduates are employed by international agencies. Indeed, it is not surprising to discover youth straining to find work with humanitarian organizations in their midst, as these organizations seem to be the main institutions with a stable availability of regular work. This issue appears to have been almost entirely unobserved in the literature.
9. Of the six program areas reviewed here – vocational training, reproductive health programs, basic skills training, peace education, youth empowerment efforts, and psycho-social programs – youth empowerment was the weakest program area reviewed. Descriptions of interesting youth events, organizing efforts and the like were described. Yet it was generally difficult to decipher which youth were included (and which were not) and what the impact of such efforts might have been. This is not to say that helping to empower youth is not important. It is simply to state that, with notable exceptions, descriptions of impact were generally vague and the level of quality information was low.

### ***Recommendations***

The following recommendations emerge directly from the nine findings described above. They suggest next steps for devising more effective programming for conflict and post-conflict youth, and are as follows:

1. Significantly expand the participation of female and lower-class youth in program development. The general inattention to these issues is thoroughly alarming.
2. Immediately address the startling scarcity of quality evaluation documents.
3. Dramatically enhance and disseminate the documentation of:
  - a. Program approaches that can yield lasting positive results;
  - b. Strategic planning, coordination and networking; and
  - c. The context of youth programming, including the role that international agencies play in war and post-war economies.
4. Highlight youth resilience and consistently demonstrate effective partnerships with youth in programming.
5. More effectively position programs where youth increasingly reside (such as in cities).
6. Seriously explore possibilities for expanding youth access to capital.
7. Upgrade the overall quality of youth program documentation, and youth empowerment programs in particular.

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**C. Descriptions of Youth Projects: A Selected Sample of Internet Sites**

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Care USA. Project Description for Maradi Youth Project in Niger.

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Accessed on 9/01/04

International Childcare Trust. Project description for MVP Vocational Training Center in Sri Lanka

<http://www.ict-uk.org/srilanka02.html> Accessed on 09/01/04

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[http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/children/programmes\\_children.html](http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/children/programmes_children.html) Accessed on 09/01/04

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Search for common ground. Project description for Nashe Maalo: Television, Theatre and Outreach projects in Macedonia.

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## **About EQUIP3 and Contact Information**

EQUIP3 / Youth Trust ([www.equip123.net](http://www.equip123.net)) is a USAID-funded Leader with Associates mechanism created to improve the quality of education, learning opportunities, improved livelihoods, and increased civic engagement for youth and young adults. EQUIP3 is pre-competes, allowing for the quick start-up of assessment, design, and implementation of youth-oriented programs. The EQUIP3 consortium is lead by Education Development Center, Inc. and includes 12 international youth development organizations, such as the Academy for Educational Development and International Youth Foundation.

### **EQUIP3 / Youth Trust Consortium:**

Education Development Center, Inc. • Academy for Educational Development • Catholic Relief Services • International Council on National Youth Policy • International Youth Foundation • National Youth Employment Coalition • National Youth Leadership Council • Opportunities Industrialization Centers International • Partners of the Americas • Plan International Childreach • Sesame Workshop • Streetkids International • World Learning

### **Contacts:**

Clare Ignatowski, EQUIP3 CTO, EGAT/ Office of Education, [cignatowski@usaid.gov](mailto:cignatowski@usaid.gov) ; 202-712-1759

Paul Sully, EQUIP3 Project Director, Education Development Center, Inc. [psully@edc.org](mailto:psully@edc.org) ; 202-572-3770