UNICEF PROGRAMME FOR THE REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED FORCES AND ARMED GROUPS IN NEPAL

EVALUATION REPORT:
May 2008
Foreword

It has been two years since UNICEF and the CAAFAG Working Group started to address the issue of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups in Nepal. During this time the CAAFAG Group have faced numerous challenges, and learnt many lessons which continue to help improve programmes for these children.

The principle learning has been that despite the challenges, it is possible to reach many children who have been affected by their association with Armed Forces and Armed Groups. We are encouraged that communities and children are pleased with the support they are receiving and that the majority have found the programme has had a positive impact on their lives. Hence the call to extend the programme nationwide to other children identified by their communities as similarly affected by conflict.

I wish to thank the UNICEF team and the CAAFAG Working Group for their concerted efforts to implement programmes that have achieved so much within a short period of time.

As well as highlighting successful strategies, this report also outlines a number of areas which can be improved. These include the need to strengthen partnerships with the government regarding children’s reintegration, and renew advocacy efforts for the release of children who are still held in cantonments several months after they have been identified as children.

I wish to thank the evaluator Sarah Maguire for the professional evaluation report she has produced which gives apt, strong and relevant recommendations. These will contribute to making a difference in the lives of Nepali children affected by armed conflict in Nepal.

Gillian Mellsop

Representative
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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoists (CPN-M) and the Government of Nepal (GoN) saw the end of an internal armed conflict that had played out across Nepal for over a decade. As with most armed conflicts, children were amongst those most seriously and particularly affected. They had been killed, maimed, raped, tortured, displaced and used by both parties to the conflict. The CPN-M, in particular, had recruited and used thousands of children¹ directly in hostilities, as spies, messengers, porters, recruiters and trainers of other children and for propaganda purposes.

The CPA marked the end of hostilities, gave the CPN-M a place in the interim government and provided for the immediate disarmament of all CPN-M cadres and their containment in ‘cantonments’ across the country. A significant part of the agreement was the commitment by the CPN-M to release all those who were minors in May 2006. UNICEF and its child protection partners, under the aegis of a working group for children associated with armed forces and armed groups (the CAAFAG Working Group) designed and started to implement a programme for the reintegration of up to 11,000 children who were associated with the CPN-M. The programme was broadly designed to comply with the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles) and on the basis of experience in similar contexts across the globe.

Background

Nepal is the poorest country in Asia². Around half Nepal’s children are malnourished to some extent and millions are engaged in work contrary to the ILO Convention 182. The society is beset by discrimination and marginalisation based on caste, gender and ethnicity and literacy rates is low, particularly amongst women and girls. There is no systematic birth registration but it is estimated that around 76% of the population is under 25 years old³.

Elections are scheduled for April 2008 and all are hoping that this will give the country the opportunity it needs to consolidate peace and to start making the peace dividend felt by the population.

Meanwhile, although there have been no major breaches of the CPA in terms of hostilities, both parties have neglected to honour some significant terms of the agreement. Of particular note is that the CPN-M has adhered to its commitment to release the minors in the cantonments. While many if not most have now left the armed group in one way or another, the mass release for which the programme was designed has not happened.

The Programme

The programme consists of the following components:

The CAAFAG Return and Reintegration programme operates in 34 districts and has the following components:

¹ Article 1: Convention on the Rights of the Child. Any person under 18 years old.
² Asia Development Bank report December 2007
³ 38% 15-24 (World Bank), 38% under 15 (UNESCAP)
• To advocate at national and international levels for the recognition of CAAFAG and child protection issues in Nepal as high priority in any peace agreement process.

• To facilitate the release and return of approximately children associated with the Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist (CPN-M) movement and other identified armed groups and armed forces and to prevent the recruitment of children considered at risk.

• To provide immediate care, family tracing and reunification services by supporting interim care facilities and by providing psychosocial training to child protection teams and community groups.

• To sensitize, inform and mobilize families and communities to provide protection to these children and support full reintegation through national and local community campaigns, and to promote children’s participation in all steps of programme implementation.

• To build the capacity of NGO partners, community groups and civil society activists in programme implementation as it applies to child protection, through training, workshops and staff support.

In addition, the programme is concerned with reconciliation and peace-building.

In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocol (OP) on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the children with whom the UNICEF programme is concerned fall into four main categories. All were previously associated either with the national security forces or with the CPN-M and it is recognised that there may be some overlap between the categories:

• Children currently in the cantonment sites;
• Children who have ‘self-released’ including those who have escaped from the CPN-M at any time;
• Children who may have been asked to leave the cantonment sites on an informal basis;
• Vulnerable children.

UNICEF’s role in the programme is mainly centred on coordination, raising and accounting for funds and providing technical support to national partners. UNICEF chairs the CAAFAG Working Group. In addition, UNICEF conducts advocacy both within the UN and with the GoN and the CPN-M.

The Evaluation

UNICEF commissioned a ‘real-time’ evaluation of the programme to ensure that it was compliant with the Paris Principles and other international standards, to help guide the future of the programme and to identify main constraints and challenges that UNICEF and its partners may be facing.

The evaluation took place in December 2007 and January 2008. The methodology consisted of a desk / documentary review and field work. The latter consisted of interviews, discussions and observations of the programme’s work in the field and in Kathmandu. People who were interviewed included children, parents, community members, teachers, implementing partners, political leaders and government representatives as well as members of the CAAFAG Working Group.
Thanks are due to the Secretary General’s Special Representative in Nepal, to the CAAFAG Working Group, particularly to the staff members of UNICEF and implementing partners who worked on planning, supporting and implementing this evaluation, to the teachers and community leaders who gave their time with good grace and candour and, above all, to the children of Nepal who have already given so much.

1.1 **Main Findings**

The practical components of the programme include:

- Support to education for CAAFAG and schools
- Psycho-social support to children, families and communities
- Advocacy with parties to the conflict, families, communities and professionals
- Vocational training and income generation
- Community sensitisation and awareness-raising

This is an innovative and programme in an unusual context. It is innovative because it creates the opportunity and opens space for UNICEF, child protection partners, parties to the armed conflict and others to tackle some of the more difficult questions relating to child reintegration. It is also amongst the first child reintegration programmes to take place after the promulgation of the Paris Principles.

In order for the programme to succeed, it needs commitment from all concerned: The GoN as currently constituted, the CPN-M as a recruiting party to the armed conflict, the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), UN agencies and departments represented in Nepal and their NGO partners, both international and national. The programme also depends for its success on a unified and consistent message that the recruitment or use of children by armed groups is always a violation of their rights and that they have a right, therefore, to immediate release and reintegration into civilian life.

The resources available to the programme include:

- International law and standards (including the CRC and its OP, the Paris Principles, other international standards, international humanitarian law);
- International attention through the Security Council and in the lead up to the elections;
- The CAAFAG Working Group which has matured and strengthened since March 2007;
- Existing community-based organisations and other mechanisms such as para-legal committees, women’s groups and Child Clubs as well as District Child Welfare Boards, education boards and other GoN mechanisms;
- Line ministries engagement – particularly the establishment of a focal point at ministry level and the start of a National Plan for Reintegration of children affected by armed conflict;
- Trained and committed national staff in both national and international organisations;
- International know-how and experience including UNICEF, UNMIN, INGOs;
- The donor / diplomatic community;
- Financial resources - albeit relatively short-term.

It is important to remember that the programme also has the benefit of the children themselves, whether CAAFAG or otherwise conflict-affected, their parents, communities, teachers and religious leaders. During the conflict, thousands of children will have been recruited and used by the armed groups or forces in one way or another and many of these will have already returned home – either to remain associated or having left their
association. Some of these children will now be adults and can contribute to the reintegration of today’s children.

The programme faces constraints, nevertheless and these can be listed as follows:

- The use of children as negotiating tools or ‘tit for tat’ exchanges about compliance with the CPA;
- A lack of urgency about children’s release and reintegration – across the international community as well as the GoN and the CPN-M. At times this has manifested itself as political interference and implementing partners have had to make brave decisions about how to deal with threats to the programme or even themselves as individuals;
- The fact that the GoN is currently refusing to take on the programme after international funding finishes;
- Some inconsistency in messaging across the UN where the child protection agenda is in tension with the political agenda;
- Political / violent / unrest and fragmentation. This was particularly prevalent towards the end of the evaluation period when the Terai was the subject of strikes and disturbances, in which children were involved and were reportedly subject to over-zealous control by the state security forces;
- Some ambiguity about the status of the Young Communist League – a sister organisation to the CPN-M and some other groups;
- Lack of information about children in the cantonments or in the community. The implementing partners’ social workers try to find out what they can but are reliant on informants. This lack of information is partly due to the reluctance of some international agencies to acknowledge that there was an armed conflict in Nepal and so did not / could not seek to find out how the conflict was affecting children;
- Linked to the above, the child protection agencies, including UNICEF have not been granted unfettered access to the minors in the cantonments;
- The stipend issue, where children as well as adults were to be paid a lump, cash sum as they left the cantonments. The total sum of NRs27,000 is equivalent to over two year’s average salary;
- The invisibility of children and youth in political agendas. No political party seeking to win votes at the election has a platform including children’s or youth rights and none are seeking to win the youth vote;
- With a few notable exceptions, development programming, to date, has not taken account of children’s or youth’s rights or what they can contribute.

The main strengths of the programme can be described as follows:

It is a high profile, innovative programme for children from (usually) very marginalised communities, which is introducing concepts and practice of child protection and child participation into mainstream. It is addressing some difficult questions in practice such as the issue of appropriate children’s political participation, the meaning of “community-based reintegration”, children’s place in peace-processes, understanding the meaning and practical implications of child participation and the meaning of successful reintegration and as such is breaking ground, globally. It is also opening the space to talk about youth as a positive cohort for peace, rather than simply a dangerous group to be contained;

The programme is engaging in catalytic initiatives such as (a) opening dialogue with local government about including children from marginalised communities in economic initiatives, (b) advocacy with political parties about responsibilities to protect children), (c) Linking with initiatives on women’s human rights such as UNSC Resolution 1325\(^4\).

\(^4\) UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security
The programme is well coordinated and aligned, where possible, with GoN structures and initiatives.

The programme has chosen its implementing partners with care and on the basis of the extent to which they are embedded in the local community and can negotiate and navigate the complex political context.

The main challenges to the programme can be identified as follows:

The evaluation found that the following issues at the design and early implementation stages of the programme are having real or potential negative impacts on the programme:

The programme was designed with an expectation of mass release from cantonments. This has continued with false promises which have taken up much time and resources of the implementing partners and has, on occasion, threatened their credibility with the community. It has also meant that there were many more children who were identified in the community – rather than going through the formal release and reintegration mechanism – than had been anticipated and so the ‘quotas’ set and budgeted for at the beginning of the programme were far exceeded. This has meant that some children have not been registered for support, while others have been registered for it but placed on a defacto ‘waiting list’ while others receive only limited psycho-social support although they are eligible for other support such as support to attend school.

While it is to be applauded that the programme is community-based and brings in non-CAAFAG children, it is complex in parts, especially with regard to individual or school-based support to children. This means it is difficult to articulate and can be difficult to manage.

Some of the necessary relationships were not forged or were not formalised at the beginning of the programme. These include the relationship with the monitoring and reporting mechanism set up pursuant to UNSC Resolution 1612, the coordination with the UNDP programme (which was not designed until some months after the UNICEF programme had started) and the relationship with the peace process. International standards state that children’s reintegration should be de-linked from political processes. The concern with Nepal is that the two were so delinked as to make children invisible in the political process. Lessons from other contexts have shown that, where sensitive issues are not included at the earliest stages of political processes, they become ‘controversial’ and more difficult to integrate as time moves on.

Partnerships through the CAAFAG Working Group have become more effective as the programme matures and due to excellent coordination and collaboration by UNICEF. Other partnerships that are now being forged would have been useful at an earlier stage, such as with the ILO and with the World Bank, in both cases on livelihoods issues.

Child protection itself is a relatively new concept and area for most national staff and staff of international implementing partners as well as community structures such as School Management Committees, the para-legal committees and GoN local structures. This necessitates quite intensive mentoring and support, as well as initial training. Similarly, the concept and modalities of child participation is largely uncharted territory for both national staff and international organisations. The rhetoric is easy to understand, yet the ‘how to’ and the ways of managing tensions between children’s right to participate and their right to be protected are less well understood or practiced.

The programme is, rightly, ambitious and strives to comply with international standards. This, however, requires capacity to design and implement components that have their own complexities, such as the vocational training and income generation component which needed more extensive planning and analysis in order to be effective.
The programme has obtained a great deal of information about children, their origins, their reasons for joining the armed group and their experience while associated with the CPN-M. The challenge is to translate this information into useful knowledge, both for this programme and for those to follow in other countries.

While the programme is more gender-aware than many and certainly has addressed some of the major issues facing girls returning to their communities, it could be stronger with a deeper gender analysis and a systematic look at how to protect girls from harmful cultural practices such as early marriage, which has been used as a means of avoiding stigma and of social control over girls who may have come home more assertive and less compliant than their peers. Currently, the understanding of girls’ situation tends to cluster around a lament that “It’s more difficult for girls”.

**Programme Components**

**Education**

This is one of the strongest and most straightforward components. In short, it offers children ‘in-kind’ support to return to or remain in school, while offering the school financial support for infrastructure or materials to support all the children. The school also makes a contribution by agreeing to waive the child’s school fees – more of a symbol of support than a substantial contribution. For every two CAAFAG supported in this way, one ‘vulnerable’ child is, also.

Children, parents, teachers and school managers all report positively on this component. As well as the opportunity it provides for follow-up with the children and for maintaining the psycho-social support, teachers say that the children are mature in their approach to their studies and are exemplary students, while appreciating the extra support to building classrooms or water tanks, for example. There have been some inappropriate use of funds, such as for walls without roofs, or photocopiers without electricity but these problems have been ironed out. It is important to maintain scrutiny, however, which requires staff resources of implementing partners.

This component is coordinated well with the main UNICEF education programme, largely because it operates in different districts and because it deals with different issues.

The main challenge for the future of the programme will be how to manage the arrival, at school, of children with unheard of amounts of cash and avoid them either becoming vulnerable to abuse or ‘hero-worshipped’ by other children.

**Vocational Training**

This is perhaps the weakest component of the programme, although far from the least important. There are few children engaged, currently, in vocational training, most of whom are girls and of whom most are engaged in gender-stereotypical work such as tailoring or beautification. While all the girls interviewed in the course of the evaluation were happy with their training, many were illiterate and innumerate and all lacked basic business skills. None of this was being remedied by the programme.

The implementing partners were not always sure why they were carrying out this component, except that it has some (not insignificant) psycho-social benefits. Children talk about being kept away from suicide, making friends for the first time since returning from the cantonments and learning a useful skill for their homes, that would make them more valued
at home. The budget for this component is misguided (NRs 8,000 per child) and does not provide for a child to take home a sewing machine or start her own business. Nor does it provide for basic literacy, numeracy, business or life skills training.

The challenge here is to make this important component viable, to increase its budget so that it can function effectively and to ensure that it takes proper account of the protection needs of children engaged in training rather than schooling.

**Income generation / economic opportunities**

As with vocational training, it appears that this component would have been stronger if it had been designed with more market analysis or expertise about livelihoods. The lesson here is that these components require their own area of expertise and that, where capacity does not exist within the child protection agencies, it should be brought in.

This component could be both very strong and have a real impact on the children’s reintegration. It is encouraging that the World Bank and the ILO are now expressing an interest in collaborating with the CAAFAG Working Group as these are exciting times for Nepal in terms of economic regeneration, from the rural electrification programmes to producers' cooperatives at district level or livestock training. The children and youth that are emerging from the cantonments can make a substantial contribution to the economic regeneration of Nepal – if they are given the chance.

**Psycho-social support**

This is another relatively strong component, where the training of social workers combines with a deep commitment on the part of the national and international staff members to understand the children and to help them and their families to reintegration. The competence and confidence of the social workers is clearly directly proportionate to the training they have received.

The training and experience gained by the social workers, teachers and community members has started to create a cohort of personnel within the community who are able and willing to address the psycho-social needs of conflict-affected children. In a context where, as stated above, there is little culture of child protection, this is to be valued. It will need continued support and mentoring to ensure that it is sustainable.

The main challenge here is to maintain the momentum of this positive work, while ensuring that the social workers are not spread so thinly across the community that they cannot support any child well.

**Community Sensitisation, Mobilisation and Awareness-Raising**

This is a central and important component of the programme. It has helped to identify children who are eligible for support by the programme, to increase the likelihood that problems with reintegration can be identified at an early stage and to reassure parents and children that the community is ready to receive children back home. In the family and community-centred society of Nepal, this component is central to the success of the whole programme. It is also in line with the Paris Principles and other international standards that communities are prepared and supported to take back their children.
The work is largely done by social workers going into communities and talking with people. The latter will include families, community leaders, children, teachers, health professionals and so on. Community sensitisation also takes place through community-based organisations (CBOs) by organising community events and by using the leadership of these organisations.

The sensitisation part of the Programme is the most nebulous, as it involves so much informal contact on a repeated basis with a range of actors, from individual parents to chairs of CBOs. Implementing partners find it difficult to articulate, compared to the education component which is easier to document and to track. It is helpful here to ask what would have happened if the work had not been done, rather than asking what impact it had.

The international NGO Search for Common Ground has been using the radio as a powerful media to discuss issues of children’s association with armed groups. Although the evaluation did not delve deeply into community take-up and perception of these radio programmes, national implementing partners were aware of them and wanted to do something similar in their areas.

The challenge here is to make the key messages more explicit. It is regrettable that there visual messaging is missing in this component. It would be helpful, even at this late stage in the programme, to have an information / awareness campaign across the country stating that Nepal’s children equally welcome, valuable and precious to their parents, communities and society as a whole.

1.2 Key Recommendations

To UNMIN, UN agencies and Departments, the GoN, donors and international and national NGOs:

- Recognise that the association of children with the CPN-M is an egregious violation of children’s rights according to international law and determine to bring about its cessation;
- Decide how the delivery of the stipend to minors leaving the cantonments can be conducted in a way that is consistent with international standards – particularly the core principles of the CRC;
- Decide on the core message that the community should receive about CAAFAG and to deliver it, by visual means as well as advocacy and community sensitisation;
- Place children and youth at the centre of programming for the transition to peace, taking cognisance of their capacities and contribution;

To UNMIN, UNICEF and other UN agencies and departments:

- Adopt a robust, consistent and sustained advocacy approach with the CPN-M and GoN to effect the immediate release of remaining minors, prevent their recruitment into any groups using violence for political ends and to effect their reintegration into civilian society;
- Position UNICEF as a key actor across the UN system as the lead global agency for child protection;
• Decide on how the most appropriate response to child protection issues and to plan accordingly;
• Collaborate and align programmes in the best interests of children and youth and taking account of their capacities and strengths;

To the CAAFAG Working Group and donors:

• Address the transition of programme from short-term emergency response to a more complex, slower-time programme;
• Register all CAAFAG; Budget for children above ‘quota’ and support as necessary Maintain and extend dialogue with all parties with influence over the reintegration of children, including any emerging groups and all political leaders;
• Simplify programme wherever possible;
• Coordinate and build partnerships with other programmes including targeted budget support, poverty alleviation strategies, work on UNSC Resolution 1325;
• Continue to build national capacity;
• Develop strategy for addressing gender issues;
• Find an alternative to the current modality of the vocational training component so that it can become viable and realise its potential. Investigate the possibility of the ILO or an expert NGO taking the lead, with appropriate resources;
• Further develop the relationship with the World Bank, relevant ministries and departments to ensure the effectiveness of the economic self-sufficiency / income-generating component, recognising the contribution that youth have to offer;
• Ensure that the psycho-social component is made uniform in terms of the training received by implementing partners and that they are sufficiently resourced to continue building the capacity of the community in this regard;
• Develop an information flow and advocacy strategy, including public information;
• Develop a youth & peace-building strategy.
2.0 Introduction

After an internal armed conflict lasting over a decade, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2006 heralding a land-mark in the peace process. After some delays and interruptions, elections are now scheduled for April 2008. During the course of this conflict between the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist (CPN-M) and the Government of Nepal (GoN), many children were recruited and used by the CPN-M and informal groups affiliated with the GoN. Although the legal age limit for recruitment by the national armed forces is set at 18, it is not known if children have been recruited or used contrary to national law.

The peace process has resulted in a cessation of armed violence by the CPN-M and the inclusion of CPN-M representatives in the interim government. Under the terms of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, all CPN-M armed cadres are confined to ‘cantonments’ across Nepal, while the GoN armed forces are confined to barracks apart from specific activities and training. All those who were under 18 in May 2006 are entitled to benefit from the UNICEF programme described below. It is estimated that there are now approximately 3,000 people in this situation.

Since March 2007, UNICEF and its partners, including the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), UN agencies and departments, national and international NGOs and other international organisations have been conducting a programme for children who were associated with any armed force or armed group, aimed at their release and reintegration into civilian life. These organisations meet regularly as a Working Group on Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (the CAAFAG Working Group).

Background

Context

Nepal is the poorest country in Asia. It is chronically food insecure and is characterised by widespread social exclusion and discrimination on the basis of gender, caste and ethnicity. The armed conflict – in no small part fuelled by these factors – has also contributed to Nepal’s parlous economic state. Health and education facilities in the rural areas have been largely destroyed or fallen into disrepair. Almost half Nepal’s children are malnourished to some extent and millions are engaged in child labour contrary to international law, including domestic servitude, casual manual labour and prostitution. The combination of the lack of systematic birth registration and the armed conflict means that the demography of Nepal is largely unknown. It is estimated, however, that around 76% of the population is under 25 years old.

Years of poor governance have also led to a weak legal and judicial system. There is no effective juvenile justice system and child protection legislation is either absent or poorly implemented. There is little confidence between the security system (police, national armed forces and judiciary) and the population – particularly those from ‘lower’ castes or in the more remote areas.

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5 The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that a child is anyone under 18 years old.
6 Asia Development Bank report December 2007
7 38% 15-24 (World Bank), 38% under 15 (UNESCAP)
Education has been identified as a significant factor in the recruitment and retention of children by the armed group and in programming for reintegration. School infrastructure has fallen into disrepair, teachers were targeted and children were often recruited or otherwise targeted by one party to the armed conflict or the other at or on their way to school. Currently, the education system is decentralised and schools are governed at the local level, while remaining accountable to the Ministry of Education.

The peace process has brought a cessation of violence between the CPN-M and the GoN. It has not, however, brought peace across Nepal; political and sometimes violent unrest has been particularly prevalent in the Terai region, with the advent of various groups with real or purported political agendas. Of these, those identifying as Madhesi are the most prominent. Their ambiguous status is reflected in community perceptions that they can be ‘political by day, violent by night’.

Nor has the peace process, yet, brought much in the way of tangible benefits to the poorest or most marginalised of Nepali society. Rural people are glad not to be targeted for ‘taxes’ or recruitment by the Maoists and schools are able to open without harassment, but the real impact of peace for this deeply poor society is yet to be felt.

Implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)

In terms of armed activity, the CPA is being honoured by both sides. The UN is monitoring compliance and there have been no significant reports of breaches. Unfortunately, however, other provisions that relate to the futures of CPN-M cadres have been slower in their implementation. Of these, one of two most significant is the failure to dismiss those under 18 in May 2006 from the cantonments. Although many of these children and youth have left – either with permission from their commanders or by other means – as of late December 2007 there were estimated to be around 3,000 still languishing effectively in the custody of the CPN-M. Advocacy by UNICEF and its partners seems to have fallen on stony ground; the reasons are described in more detail below.

The other main area in which implementation has been slow is in the area of Security System Reform. Committees were supposed to be established to work on the democratisation of the national armed forces and the integration of CPN-M cadres. Whether or not this currently means or has ever meant that the CPN-M cadres will be absorbed per se into the national security sector is still contested. At the second round of verifications, more than 8,000 people were absent, of which it is estimated that a sizeable proportion were minors. The second round identified around 4,000 people who were ‘disqualified’ from being fit for absorption into the national armed forces, of which nearly 3,000 were minors. As of late January 2008, the CPN-M leadership had not informed its cadres in the cantonments which of them would be eligible for integration, apparently out of a concern about their reaction to this news.

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8 The verification process which finished in December 2007 found 2973 still in cantonments. Some of these may have already left.
3.0 The Evaluation

UNICEF commissioned this evaluation in order to: ensure that it is “doing the right thing” and “doing it the right way” – the two central questions for all monitoring and evaluation, to guide the programme for the rest of its duration and to capture lessons for other programmes in the region or further afield. In line with a growing consensus amongst programme managers and evaluators, it was considered useful to conduct the exercise during the currency of the programme rather than to conduct an ex-post-facto evaluation. Terms of Reference are at Annex A. The more detailed objectives of the exercise are:

- To describe the release, return and reintegration process of children in Nepal, highlighting those areas that prove to limit access of children to services or reintegration support and those which facilitate the process;

- To evaluate the impact of the programme on the children in their transition to civilian life including a comparison between the CAAFAG and non-CAAFAG children in the communities;

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the various components of the programme;

- To evaluate the application of the major relevant international instruments, including the ‘Paris Guidelines/ Commitments’ and how they may guide the future of the programme;

- To evaluate the gender dimensions of the programme as it affects girls and boys respectively;

- Where relevant, to evaluate the social impact of the payment of stipends to children;

- To assess the respective contributions of UNICEF, the CAAFAG Working Group and the Resolution 1612 Task Force to advocacy that has affected the major decision-making for the implementation of the programme;

- To highlight the constraints faced by UNICEF and partners in implementing the programme;

- To assess the role of other partners including UNMIN, OHCHR, UNDP, WFP and UNFPA on the implementation of the programme and assess this collaboration;

- To assess the opportunities for increased or new collaboration with other organisations (international and national);

- To assess the extent to which donor investment has contributed to the achievement of the programme;

Method

A single consultant, with support from UNICEF’s Child Protection Section, conducted the evaluation field work during January 2008. This was preceded by preparation and documentary review, including notes of CAAFAG Working Group review meetings, reports to donors and programme documents. An inception report (attached at Annex B) was prepared
in consultation with the CAAFAG Working Group and formed the basis of an meeting with that group at the beginning of the evaluation. The field work was followed by a pair of meetings in Kathmandu in order to report back on and triangulate preliminary findings. These meetings were hosted by UNICEF senior management and invitees included the CAAFAG Working Group, the donor / diplomatic community, UN colleagues and representatives of the GoN and the CPN-M. An early draft of this report was shared with CAAFAG Working Group members for comment.

The methodology for the field work consisted mainly of discussions, interviews and observation with individuals and groups. The group discussions included Child Clubs, children doing training, groups of teachers, School Management Committees and paralegal groups.

In Kathmandu, discussions and interviews were conducted with UNICEF staff members, the CAAFAG Working Group, the donor / diplomatic community, UNICEF senior management and representatives of UNMIN including the SRSG and Child Protection Section. The consultant then travelled to field sites of Chitwan, Sindhuli, Makwanpur, Kapilvastu, Nawalparasi, Butwal and Surkhet. Interviews and discussions in the field locations focused on government representatives, political leaders, school teachers, school management committees as well as children (CAAFAG and others), parents, trainers and local implementing partners. The consultant was accompanied by UNICEF staff members and (for the Central region) a member of TPO.

Evaluation exercises are inevitably limited in their reach and scope; priorities have to be decided on. Time constraints meant that only the West and Central regions could be visited although discussions were held with the regional team for the Eastern and far Western regions. Other people’s time constraints also meant that some discussions could not take place. This is to be expected in a context of rapid change where many of the people to be interviewed are engaged in effecting those transitions.

The reintegration of children who have been associated with armed forces or armed groups has relatively recently been recognised as an area for discreet professional concern by child protection agencies. Many of the key questions which ask, for instance, “What is successful reintegration” or “how can child protection agencies prevent recruitment” remain opaque although agencies (and their national partners) are striving towards answers. Additionally, many of the components of reintegration ‘packages’ are qualitative rather than quantitative. By definition, therefore, evaluations of child reintegration programmes will also be qualitative. The imperative for good practice in evaluations as well as programme delivery with regard to children means that children’s experience should not be measured only numerically or according to rigid indicators. This evaluation is no exception and relies heavily on observation, reports from children, families and communities as well as child protection professionals.

Thanks are due to all the staff of the UNICEF Child Protection Section and implementing partners who worked tirelessly to make the visits smooth and productive. Thanks are also due to the teachers, community members government officials and political party representatives who gave generously of their time. Above all, thanks are due to the children, their families and communities for their unfailing welcome and support.
4.0 The UNICEF Programme

The CAAFAG Return and Reintegration programme operates in 34 districts and has the following components:

- To **advocate** at national and international levels for the recognition of CAAFAG and child protection issues in Nepal as high priority in any peace agreement process.

- To facilitate the **release and return** of approximately children associated with the Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist (CPN-M) movement and other identified armed groups and armed forces and to prevent the recruitment of children considered at risk.

- To provide **immediate care, family tracing and reunification** services by supporting interim care facilities and by providing psychosocial training to child protection teams and community groups.

- To sensitize, inform and mobilize families and communities to provide protection to these children and support full **reintegration** through national and local community campaigns, and to promote children’s participation in all steps of programme implementation.

- To **build the capacity** of NGO partners, community groups and civil society activists in programme implementation as it applies to child protection, through training, workshops and staff support.

In addition, the programme is concerned with reconciliation and peace-building.

Consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, UNICEF and its child protection partners are concerned with all children who have been associated with the armed groups or armed forces, regardless of their current status or situation. The children with whom the UNICEF programme is concerned fall into four main categories. All were previously associated with the CPN-M and it is recognised that there may be some overlap between the categories:

- Children currently in the cantonment sites;

- Children who have ‘self-released’ including those who have escaped from the CPN-M at any time;

- Children who may have been asked to leave the cantonment sites on an informal basis;

- Vulnerable children.

UNICEF’s operational partners in the programme consist of UN entities, international organizations, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and national NGOs. The GoN, while holding primary responsibility for the protection of children in Nepal, has taken a more active role towards the end of 2007, including the development of a national plan of action for reintegration and with regard to children’s education.
UNICEF’s role in the programme is mainly centred around coordination, raising and accounting for funds and providing technical support to national partners. UNICEF chairs the CAAFAG Working Group.

4.1 The Programming Context

Nepal has a CAAFAG Working Group which meets monthly regularly in Kathmandu – more often when necessary - and regularly in the regions. It is comprised of UN bodies including the UNMIN Child Protection Section and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, international NGOs and national partner organisations. ICRC and the National Human Rights Commission attend as observers. The Working Group is coordinated and convened by UNICEF and aims to have a joint or harmonised approach to issues of children’s release and reintegration. The achievements of the Working Group are addressed separately in this report.

UNICEF and its partners have wide experience in the release, return and reintegration of CAAFAG across the world. In most instances, a formal “DDR” programme has been established for adults and children and in most instances; they take place at the cessation of hostilities. Increasingly, however, UNICEF and its partners are effective in obtaining the release and starting the reintegration of children even while the armed conflict continues. The Nepal programme falls somewhere between these two paradigms, as the armed conflict has, thankfully, ended, yet one of the parties to the armed conflict refuses to allow the release of all the children and keeps them under military command and control structures.

As will be discussed below, the programme was designed in the belief that all the children would be released quite quickly upon the formalisation of the peace process, rather than individually or in small groups spread over more than one year. Currently, then, the programme is dealing with a large cohort of children who are already back in their communities (or another) and a remaining cohort of children who stay in the cantonments with their adult colleagues.

There is a growing consensus that reintegration in all its dimensions – social, economic, demilitarisation, educational, psychological – takes more than a few days or weeks; that the process of becoming a civilian after being associated with an armed group for months or years, is a long one and requires a range of intensive interventions and long-term commitment. There is also a growing consensus that, for children at least, reintegration should take place as far as possible in the community and that it should be community-based. While the programme is firmly community-based, the UNICEF programme is not unlimited in time and so can realistically deal with the initial or – at best – medium term reintegration of these children as a discreet set of interventions. No criticism should be implied here; it is simply to say that it will be necessary for UNICEF and its partners to find ways of ensuring a smooth transition from the shorter-term ‘reinsertion’ interventions that the programme currently offers to more long-term, child protection reintegration work. The challenge here will be to ensure that these children are not wholly subsumed into mainstream, development protection programming before they have reached an appropriate stage of reintegration.

Child protection issues in Nepal are pervasive, acute and chronic. As stated above, millions of children are engaged in work contrary to international law, while others experience severe levels of discrimination on the basis of caste and gender. Trafficking of children for labour or
sexual exploitation is also common. UNICEF and its child protection partners have
developed much strength over the last few years and so the challenge will be to integrate
work on these child rights violations with that of child recruitment and use.

Prevention of recruitment or re-recruitment is now recognised globally as a particular risk for
children who have been associated or used by an armed force or group. It is to be hoped
that the peace process in Nepal will be consolidated and that the emerging groups will gain
or retain a political aim without the use of violence or disappear as the national situation
stabilises. Additionally, if the peace process were to break down and there be a return to
conflict, those children and youth now with the Young Communist League are more likely
than their peers to be brought back into the armed wing of the CPN-M or its successor.

Peace-building is not an event but a process. To make peace irreversible means involving all
sectors of society and ensuring that none are excluded from the process. Further, it means
harnessing the potential, experience and skills of all sectors of society, including minorities,
women and young people. Absent a total breakdown in the immediate peace process, the
youth of Nepal do not form an imminent threat to peace and national security. The
reintegration of CAAFAG, therefore, is not a ‘make or break’ for the immediate prospects for
peace. The more challenging and productive view, however, is to explore how these youth
can be used productively to contribute to peace-building. Youth returning from armed groups
of any political complexion often arrive home with skills, greater leadership potential and a
sense of the imperative for peace. They have an investment in peace dividends that their
peers may not have. They are, however, militarised and the very leadership skills that they
have acquired during their association can be a negative influence if not channelled
appropriately. The UNICEF programme, therefore, offers an opportunity to focus on these
youth as potential peace-builders; to channel them towards organisations and initiatives that
value their potential and to bring in other youth who have experienced violations of their
rights, including children involved in hazardous work or returned trafficked children or other
children who have been adversely affected by the armed conflict.

Armed conflict, civil unrest and political fragility are all obstacles to development. Peace-
building, on the other hand, both lays the foundation for development and is a pre-requisite
for development over time. Effective development, especially in a demographic context
where nearly 40% of the population is in the youth demographic, it is obviously central to the
future of Nepal to deal effectively with – and involve – these young people.

The Normative Framework

The main international instruments here are the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OP). Associated
with this and other human rights instruments are the Paris Principles and Guidelines on
Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles), the Guiding
Principles on Internal Displacement and relevant UN Security Council Resolutions.
International humanitarian law (IHL) is, of course, also relevant and useful to guide
programming for children affected by armed conflict.

These norms and standards provide both the imperative to programme for the release and
reintegration of children who have been recruited or used by armed forces or groups and
provide guidance and ‘best practice’ in how to do so. Particularly, the CRC and its OP as well as Security Council Resolutions 1539 and 1612 and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court are all clear that the recruitment or use of children is an egregious violation of their rights and, as such, cannot be tolerated.

As this is one of the first child reintegration programmes to be executed since the promulgation of the Paris Principles, a systematic analysis of how it complies with the Paris Principles is attached at Annex C.

4.2 Definitions

As one of the objectives of this evaluation is to explore the extent to which the programme is compliant with international standards, it is necessary to examine the definitions and parameters of the programme vis-a-vis the most accepted definitions. The Paris Principles – drawn up to be compliant and consistent with existing law – state the following:

Child associated with an armed force or armed group refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.

This definition is necessarily wide in order to address the reality of children’s experience and to avoid commanders keeping children in their ranks as ‘only’ porters or cooks, for instance. National implementing partners and some staff of international partners have found it challenging to adopt this definition in the Nepal context and it has led to some difficult and pragmatic decision-making. For instance, the CPN-M would sometimes take children out of school for a few hours ‘teaching’; strictly speaking, this would make these children eligible for reintegration programme, even though they were not separated from their community for long and were not subjected to any militaristic training or work. For practical reasons, and to maintain a character of egregious violations, these children have not been considered eligible for reintegration support. Another characteristic of the CPN-M’s recruitment of children is that they would often be in the ‘cultural groups’ either completely or as an entry point or grooming period before joining the armed wing. The programme has classified these children as ‘associated’ because they are trained in militarism through the songs and dances, the allegiance they must pledge to fighting for ‘the cause’ and the danger that this association brings in the context of an armed conflict.

The issue of ‘sister organisations’ adds further complications and is dealt with in more detail below.

Child Reintegration is the process through which children transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation. Sustainable reintegration is achieved when the political, legal, economic and social conditions needed for children to maintain life, livelihood and dignity have been secured. This process aims to ensure that children can access their rights, including formal and non-formal education, family unity, dignified livelihoods and safety from harm.

\(^9\) Nepal was represented at the Paris conference to agree the Paris Principles
Child reintegration programmes can not and should not take the place of either the national government which has primary responsibility for their rights and welfare, nor of education, health or livelihoods programmes. Rather, this definition explains that a child is fully reintegrated into civil society and civilian life when s/he is able to realise her/his rights and live in dignity. It is necessary, therefore, for reintegration programmes to connect with programmes that address these issues and to recognise that sending children home to violence, neglect or destitution is not equivalent to effective reintegration. This is particularly so where the risk of children engaging in other activities that would constitute a violation of their rights is high, as in Nepal. The evaluation heard of children who had gone immediately abroad to work because of lack of opportunities in Nepal and fear of stigmatization or persecution at home. Other children may be recruited by one of the emerging groups to engage in organised armed violence.

Children live in families and communities. A child rights-based approach takes account of this and programmes for the ‘child in environment’, while supporting the child’s parents to comply with their responsibilities and duties towards the child. Community-based programming for children’s reintegration, therefore, aims at creating or supporting a protective environment for children. In Nepal, there are existing structures for child protection or that engage in child protection such as district-level Child Welfare Boards or the Para-legal groups supported by UNICEF through its Decentralised Action for Children and Women programme.

**Targeting**

Which children:

**Children associated with an armed force or armed group**

The programme focuses mainly on those children who have left the CPN-M, although it does not exclude children who may have been with other armed groups or with the national armed forces at any time. The evaluation found that this understanding was patchy across the implementing partners, with some using the acronym CAAFAG interchangeably with children associated with the CPN-M. This is understandable both as the programme is located within the context of the CPA, which focuses entirely on the CPN-M and the GoN and because the assumption at the design stage was that the real issue was those children who had been associated with the CPN-M, rather than any other, undefined, armed group or an undefined number of children in the armed forces.

An additional difficulty here is that no party to the armed conflict has been consistently willing to admit to recruiting or using children. Many agencies and officials with whom the programme should be partnering express a desire to first know how many children will be in need of reintegration. UNICEF and partners have estimated based on the number of children visually identified at the early stage of cantonment, but this does not take account of the following three categories:

- Children who had already left the CPN-M with or without permission and have already entered back into the community;

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10 Convention on the Rights of the Child
• Children who had been associated with other armed groups such as village-based militias (groups organised to fight the CPN-M);

• Children who are still associated with the CPN-M but are back in the community or elsewhere associated with sister organisations – particularly the Young Communists’ League;

• The verification process was aimed at determining which CPN-M cadres would be eligible to join which reintegration programme. It only took place in the cantonments, however, which meant that, as well as the above categories of children, those who were absent from the cantonments on the relevant days were not counted.

It is possible that, by deception, mistake or negligence, some children have been recruited into the national armed security forces. The verification process did not take place in the barracks of the national armed forces; this means that (i) Children who were associated with the armed forces are not apparent within the programme, are unlikely to have information about the programme or consider themselves eligible to be involved in it and (ii) that the programme is vulnerable to accusations of being partisan against the CPN-M, particularly as that group has not consistently admitted the use of children. It also has negative implications for future security system reform programming.

**Children not associated with an armed force or armed group**

The programme also extends support to children who have not been associated with an armed group or armed force. The criteria for admitting these children to the programme is that they must meet a requisite number of ‘vulnerability’ criteria including being girls, Dalit, very poor compared to the local community or without parents. These children are admitted for the following reasons:

• To increase community acceptance of the reintegration programme and, in turn, the returning children; It can have a negative impact on the acceptance of a child if the community perceives that they are being ‘rewarded’ for their involvement, in an armed group, particularly where there are children in that community who are also conflict-affected. This is especially so where so many children joined ‘voluntarily’; to routinely and uniformly distinguish between children who joined and those who stayed at home can create resentment amongst peers and their families.

• To ensure that the community benefits to a wider extent than would be so if only the CAAFG were targeted for support.

• To increase awareness amongst the community that these are children who have experienced violation of their rights. The children may come home apparently more confident and able to tell positive stories of their involvement; stressing that they are in a programme with vulnerable children can help the community to understand that they are still ‘just children’;

**Numbers of children**

The programme was designed to provide support to a certain number of children in each area. This was necessarily an estimate, again based on the number of children estimated to be in the cantonments and knowledge about the impact of the armed conflict on particular
areas. This has had potentially negative consequences, however. In the early stages of the programme, some partners felt that there was an imperative to find and select children; to meet the quota. They had no way of knowing, at this stage, the proportion of children who had been recruited for a long time, witnessed or taken part in violence or who were otherwise more in need of support than their peers who may have been associated for a short period and not subjected to military training or violent acts. All children who fell into the Paris Principles definition, therefore, were eligible for support and were registered into the programme. Not all of these children received support; if they were believed (or said that they were) not to be in need while others received some forms of support (e.g. social work intervention but not support to attend school) according to their need.

The quota was quickly filled, however, although children are still coming forward to be registered. This has resulted in some confusion across the programme. For instance, some partners have stopped registering children until they have additional funding to support the ‘new’ children, while others have refined their parameters of who is eligible to be included in the programme. Still others are registering all eligible children but either not providing support until funding comes or only providing social work intervention. While the reasons for this discrepancy are understandable, it is contrary to the principles of the CRC (non-discrimination) and the Paris Principles. It also makes the social workers’ work more difficult as parents will wonder why their child is not included in the programme when another child – perhaps with less need – has already been supported. It reduces the credibility of the programme amongst the communities and local government and makes the programme vulnerable to allegations of favouritism amongst the children. Further, it means that there will be no reliable indication of how many children could have been supported through the programme.

5.0 Pre-requisites for reintegration

Effective and sustainable reintegration of children into civilian life requires commitment from the national government and the international community. Much of the work of the programme staff, therefore, has involved advocacy with government representatives at central, district and lower levels and civil servants (including teachers). While this work can be labour-intensive and repetitive, it is necessary to remove obstacles to children’s reintegration such as discrimination in education or obstruction by local government officials. It is also necessary to help national government representatives to address issues of child protection – a relatively new area for most people in Nepal. Furthermore, it can strengthen other, local, initiatives such as women’s organisations, Child Welfare Committees by bringing in and reinforcing the notions of children as a resource and the need to involve them in the country’s future. The evaluation found that most staff members (national and international) were sensitive to this and spent a lot of time engaged in this advocacy.

The evaluation did find, however, that this engagement with national government officials could have been strengthened by being more systematic. This could be done by making the interactions more regular and less ad-hoc, with organised agendas and documenting the discussions, if not the outcomes of these discussions. This is particularly so where the officials are unenthusiastic about the programme or have political reservations about the children. The evaluator found frequent examples of officials at first claiming to have no or little knowledge about the programme until pressed when it was revealed that they had had many meetings with programme staff.
The donor / diplomatic community have a strong role to play in the release and reintegration of these children. While commitment is certainly shown by funding, it is shown also by expressions of support for the programme and for its aims. The evaluation found that more use could be made of this community in its diplomatic capacity, which in turn could serve to educate the donor representatives about the rationale for the programme.

The second main pre-requisite identified during the evaluation was that of clear, consistent and strong messages to be delivered by all involved in the programme or who have any influence over the reintegration of the children. This includes messaging to the community to encourage the acceptance of children, bearing in mind that this has to be developed sensitively and with regard to other children who have also suffered rights violations as well as consistency of approach to parties to the armed conflict, other groups, political leaders and community leaders. The evaluation found that there were some contradictory messages given, particularly to the CPN-M which seemed to arise from ignorance about international law and / or the UN mandate in Nepal. Finally, there needs to be consistency in the message given to the children themselves, not least to counter unhelpful or negative impressions that may be given to the children about their entitlement to support, the sort of support they may expect and the reception they will receive from their communities.

6.0 Resources available to the programme

No organisation or programme can stand alone. This programme is able to draw upon strengths at the international, organisational and local levels. The challenge is to recognise them and to make good use of them. They include:

International law and standards

As stated above, there is a body of law, standards and knowledge regarding CAAFAG that can – and does – assist the programme. It was encouraging to find that many if not most programme staff members had some knowledge of the international framework; in some instances they had fully integrated a child rights approach to their work while in most they were able to explain the core of the Paris Principles, UNSC Resolution 1612 and the CRC. This knowledge could still be up-graded; for instance it would be useful for the Paris Principles (translated into Nepali) to be distributed to all programme staff members. Recognising that there is no in-depth ‘how to’ guide to the Paris Principles or annotated version to help practitioners through the more complex questions, it is necessary for field-based staff to have mentoring support.

International attention

The situation in Nepal is now firmly on the international community’s agenda. The Security Council has recently renewed the mandate of the UNMIN until July 2008, the Secretary General’s Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict is due to visit, the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights has recently done so and UN agencies and INGOs are strengthening their presence.
The CAAFAG Working Group

The Working Group is now strong and cohesive. It has managed to sort out early tensions and is well-coordinated. Working Group members report that they have a consistent advocacy message although sometimes the necessities of working collaboratively may make this advocacy slower. Membership of the Working Group has also increased in quality and quantity over the last year, which has contributed to a greater credibility of the Working Group with donors and national government structures.

Existing community-based organisations and mechanisms

Nepal has a strong tradition of civil society organisation, be it through women’s groups, child clubs, School Management Committees or the paralegal committees. The Programme is well-placed, therefore, to work with and through these organisations, at least for support in encouraging the community to welcome their children home and to spread information about the programme.

Line ministries’ engagement

There has been significant progress regarding obtaining the support and commitment from line ministries. There is now a focal point within the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction is working with the CAAFAG Working Group to produce and implement a national action plan for reintegration, which will take account of children affected by the armed conflict. The challenges now are to build on and consolidate this progress at the same time as increasing commitment from the more reluctant ministries and to obtain uniform commitment at the regional level. This is also dealt with below.

Trained and committed national staff

National Programme partners have been selected by UNICEF and its international NGO partners, based on the national organisation’s capacity, ability to deal with sensitive issues and establishment within the community. It is clear that these decisions have been the right ones, not least because of the calibre of the national colleagues. Nepali staff members working for implementing partners and for UNICEF demonstrate a high degree of commitment and dedication to the Programme as well as a deep knowledge about Nepal, the conflict and its impact on children and their families. It became clear during the evaluation that the Programme is much more than a job for most staff members and they strive to achieve good practice. Most have been trained in child rights, psycho-social dimensions of reintegration and the normative framework. Indeed, while all welcome the opportunity to learn, there is a feeling amongst many staff members that they have had enough formal training now and would prefer to move towards mentoring or other ‘on-the-job’ learning. The technical level of understanding is generally good, with a few areas for improvement, discussed later.

International know-how and experience
The national knowledge and experience is complemented by the input of international staff members of the Working Group, many of whom have worked in other post-conflict settings in Asia as well as Africa. There was some resistance at the early stages of the programme to input from international colleagues, many of whom had experience in Africa and so it was perceived - by some - that the new colleagues were trying to push the programme into an “African model”. If this was the case at first, it is not so now and so that particular lament is evaporating, leaving space for more informed and constructive dialogue.

In addition to staff members’ own knowledge, the international organisations have a body of knowledge and expertise which can be utilised to support this programme.

**Donor / diplomatic community**

The programme has good financial support from some donors, although they state that they are under-utilised as colleagues, particularly in their capacity as the diplomatic community where they could do more in terms of quiet (or not so quiet) advocacy with the parties to the armed conflict or within UNMIN to enhance the implementation of the programme.

**Already returned children and adults**

During the currency of the armed conflict, many children and adults who were recruited or used by either party have left the armed group or force and returned to their communities or to other communities. Of these, the youth in particular, as well as younger adults, are an untapped resource for helping returning children to make appropriate decisions about their futures and to provide mentoring and psycho-social assistance.

For instance, where it is necessary to get information to children still associated with the armed group or about these children, those who have already returned are often in a strong position to help. Returning children can be asked about their experience in a way that is appropriate to their circumstances, age, capacity and psychological state which in turn can inform programming for other children.

**Children and youth**

The Programme is already demonstrating how children and youth can play an active part in welcoming and reintegrating their peers who have been away with an armed group. The Child Clubs are one such resource, where children mix easily with their peers and the leaders tend to make efforts to make the returning children welcome and ensure that they are engaged in productive activities. Most Child Clubs are school-based, however, and there are other activities that children are involved in with their peers such as speech competitions or other community events. These events are also an opportunity to help to reduce caste and gender-based discrimination by ensuring that children mix with each other and with adults from different castes.

Children have a desire and a right\(^{11}\) to participate in activities of different kinds, including holding and expressing political views. It is important that space is created for children and youth to do this in ways that do not jeopardise their best interests and do not result in their exploitation.

\(^{11}\) Article 12 CRC
Families

Children’s parents, siblings and extended families are usually keen for the children to return and want to keep them at home. There are exceptions, particularly for girls or where children have committed acts against their own community, where parents believe that it would be best for all if they left or, in girls’ cases, were married either locally or further afield. For girls, also, returning with greater confidence and reluctance to go back to traditional gender roles, families may be less enthusiastic about taking them back. Where families are positive, however, this can help the entire community to reintegrate the child.

Communities and community leaders

Nepal’s rural populations have developed community structures for mutual assistance, recreation and information. Whether this is through religious groupings and leadership, informal economic organising or child-minding, there is always some form of community leadership and influence that can be harnessed to help with the reintegration (or even identification) of children.

Teachers

These deserve to be singled out from the rest of the community because they are so significant in children’s lives, because the school is often the focal point for the local community and because education itself is both a protection tool and a protection activity. The Programme has already demonstrated that teachers can be astute, protective actors in the returning child’s life.

7.0 Obstacles and Constraints

The external operating environment is not uniformly positive for the implementation of the Programme and it faces many challenges.

Unlike many other conflicts, the children who have been recruited or used by the CPN-M, other armed groups or the armed forces have not been subjected to mass rape or mutilation, have not been forced to kill their families or to fight under threat of death. The CPN-M is, largely, an organised armed group with a coherent ideology which does not include using children as dispensable, “use and throw away” objects. International law, however, does not proscribe child recruitment and use only to prevent these additional horrors. It recognises that, while being a child in an armed group or force may make children vulnerable to these violations, all such children are placed in positions of danger, fear, isolation, separation from their families, missed schooling and, perhaps above all, to believe that might is right, that violence is a legitimate solution to conflict and to lose their own identity. It is also to be remembered that, for many children in the CPN-M, their time with the armed group has been difficult, arduous, unpleasant and dangerous. As will be discussed later, there is a need for all who are involved in the programming for these children in any way and whether they are child protection agencies, donors or UNMIN Arms monitors – not to be swayed by the relativity between these children and those who are victims of other conflicts but to keep focused on the fact that this is an egregious violation of their rights.

Political
It is disappointing that the situation for those registered as minors in the cantonments remained the same during the evaluation period. This is particularly so given the commitment in the CPA towards their release and the finalisation of the verification period in the cantonments. Advocacy by UNICEF and the CAAFAG Working Group has been aimed both at the parties to the armed conflict and within the UN Mission in an effort to encourage the latter to use its mandate to echo and support advocacy for these children. Nevertheless, there appears to be a lack of political will by the CPN-M to release these children. Reasons for this appear to be combination of treating the children as an insurance against renewed conflict, using them as a negotiating tool for wider security system reform issues (the integration of CPN-M cadres into the national security forces) and a belief that, once the elections have taken place, these children can used to cement community allegiances to the CPN-M through the Young Communist League or otherwise. To this end, the CPN-M seem determined to keep the children in the cantonments to ensure that they are kept under political (and, therefore, military) control.

It is true that there is no evidence that the children are not being subjected to violence or neglect while in the cantonments. This seems to have obscured the focus on association being a violation of their rights, apart from the membership of the CAAFAG Working Group and there is a lack of urgency about their situation. UNICEF and partners continue to plan and be prepared for the release of the children, although there is no sign of this happening before the elections, even if they are post-poned yet again. Meanwhile, the children stay in circumstances that flout international standards and are kept in a militarised environment under military command and control structures, instead of starting their reintegration into civilian life. For the older children, this may be particularly acute as they lose their right to education once they pass the age for Year 12 or, even if they do still qualify for schooling, they may be more reluctant to re-enter schooling the more they have lost.

The CPN-M blames the international community and UNICEF in particular for not providing education in the cantonments. The evaluation concludes that this is the correct decision in these circumstances. There is no valid reason for the children to be kept in the cantonments (unlike, say, refugee camps) and there are adequate educational and other facilities outside.

**Access to children in the cantonments**

Despite advocacy by the CAAFAG Working Group and UNICEF in particular and the provision in the Paris Principles for unhindered access to CAAFAG, none of the CAAFAG Working Group partners have unlimited access to the cantonments. They are controlled by the CPN-M, with monitoring by the international community only in the form of arms monitoring. It is almost impossible, therefore, to get information about the Programme to the children or to conduct follow-up monitoring to see how many are there, what they may need or want when they are released or even to pass messages from them to their families and vice versa.

**Stipends**
Again, contrary to international standards and accepted good practice, the CPN-M has negotiated a set amount to be paid to their cadres for the time spent in the cantonments. The Programme is careful not to make any unnecessary distinction between returning children and other conflict-affected children, yet these youth who have been in the cantonments will return home with an amount of cash that far outstrips normal family income.

The evaluation raised the likely impact of this with community members and was told that it would create difficulties for the children and within the community in the following ways: It promotes the view that these children have been rewarded for their involvement in the conflict or that they are somehow of more value than other children. It encourages children to spend their money on items or services that are not necessarily in their best interests. It can exacerbate gender inequalities by promoting prostitution in the communities or neighbouring communities and it makes children vulnerable to exploitation or abuse. For girls, the stigma that they may already suffer from being away from home in mixed company and with boys and men from other castes can be exacerbated if community members think they got their money in improper ways. It should be remembered that these children will come home with around NRs 27,000 in a context where a month’s school fees are around NRs35 and the average yearly salary is around NRs12,000. Some interviewees expressed the view that the children will use this money to buy an air ticket to a Gulf state and so disappear from Nepali society with little support.

**Lack of information**

Mostly due to the way children have left the CPN-M, there is a dearth of reliable information about the numbers of children and their requirements for reintegration support. The implementing partners have been imaginative about finding children through schools and community sensitisation but the picture is still patchy. This is compounded by the issue raised elsewhere about partner organisations meeting their allowed quota of children. As the Programme matures, partners are becoming more astute at identifying trends and being able to analyse them. For instance, statistics by district or even VDC of where returning children are appearing for registration can help to identify trends of where children are being accepted or not. One VDC that was relatively un-affected by the armed conflict may end up with a disproportionate number of children being registered as they and their families consider them safer there than at home.

Information about the experience of children in the CPN-M, in terms of their treatment and what skills they learned and want to build upon is similarly patchy, particularly but not exclusively for girls. There is certain reluctance amongst the implementing partners to go into detail with the children for fear of re-traumatising them. While this is understandable, it can also prevent children from being able to express themselves if they think no-one is interested or listening to them, as well as preventing the child protection organisations from tailoring the reintegration programming appropriately.

One explanation for the lack of information about children’s experience in the CPN-M or the experience of other children who have been affected by the armed conflict is that, until relatively late in the conflict, there was reluctance by some agencies to acknowledge that the country was in the grip of an internal armed conflict. It was both considered ‘too sensitive’ to
address with the GoN and there was fear that to do so would give legitimacy to an armed group.

At the same time, with a few notable exceptions, children and youth have not featured prominently in much of the development programming that has taken place across Nepal; their views have not been systematically sought and information about their lives – apart from in terms of development indices, has not been systematically gathered. This is changing now and it is to be hoped that this programme will act as a catalyst in this regard.

**Children in the peace process**

Apart from the reference to releasing all children in the CPA, children and youth have not featured explicitly in the continuing peace process. On the contrary, it appears that the imperative to reach peace meant that “other” issues were put on hold until, first, the negotiations, then the various agreements and now the elections.

It is consistent with international law and standards for children’s release and reintegration not to be dependent or tied in any way to a peace process. This may have been taken too far, in the case of Nepal, where children have ended up invisible in the peace process. The peace agreement was assisted by the international community but it was not mediated by any third party, who may have been able to take steps to ensure that child protection was at least a significant dimension of the CPA. Instead, and perhaps because of the relationship between the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) and the parties to the armed conflict which has at times been strained and at others necessitated a level of appeasment, no-one has been able to create the space to deal with the impact of the armed conflict on children. In fact, the distinction between the UN Country Team and the UN Mission may have contributed to a dislocation in the central messaging to the parties to the armed conflict.

Another reason for the invisibility of children in the peace process may be that those who have been associated with the CPN-M, unlike in some other conflicts, do not pose an immediate threat to national security and so their release and reintegration is not seen as a ‘deal breaker’ to immediate peace.

It is also right to say that children and youth do not feature on the political agenda of any of the parties involved in the Seven Party Alliance.

**Current state of violence**

Although there has been no significant breach of the peace agreement in terms of outbreaks of violence, large parts of the country have been subject to insecurity. Groups and parties purportedly representing the Madhesi communities have been engaged in civil unrest in the Terai. Many children have taken part in demonstrations that have become violent on the part of the demonstrators and the armed police sent to control them.

The evaluation found that there was a plethora of groups emerging, some armed, some criminal, some with political aims and sometimes a combination of all of these. The impact on the civilian population of groups like these can be severe, with intimidation, violence and insecurity. Often, the community reports that it is young people (mostly men and boys) carrying out these acts.
The CPN-M uses this state of insecurity as a reason not to release the children from the cantonments, saying that they would be vulnerable to re-recruitment by the other groups.

In programming terms, frequent and prolonged bandhs across the Terai have prevented access to affected communities. The involvement of children and youth in violent protest also undermines the Programme’s attempts to persuade communities to view children and youth as anything other than disruptive, violent and problematic.

The Young Communist League

The most prominent and significant of the CPN-M sister organisations for our purposes is the Young Communist League (YCL). While children are entitled to political participation, and the YCL does not appear to be an ‘armed group’ within the construct of international humanitarian law, it is clear that the work of the YCL in which children and youth are engaged is not always benign or non-violent. Nor is their participation always truly voluntary. Parents have asked Programme partners to persuade the YCL to release children, or to stop harassing and intimidating children who have left the cantonments and refused to take part in YCL activities. It is also stated that the CPN-M selected some young people who had been eligible to enter the cantonments to head up YCL branches in strategic locations.

The ambiguous nature of the YCL has caused some confusion amongst Programme partners as to whether children associated with the YCL are “associated with an armed group” – particularly given that the YCL has the same leadership as the CPN-M and YCL cadres will talk in terms of being prepared to fight and die for “the cause”. It is suggested that a way out of this confusion is to think in terms of child protection – that if a child is involved in something that results in a violation of their rights (e.g. forced separation from family or attack by other groups) this is a child protection concern and therefore should be dealt with by advocacy with the perpetrators and reintegration assistance once they are safe. Even where children are not being subjected to any violation of their rights, it is incumbent on the YCL and its leadership to ensure that they are not put in any danger because of their association. It is also incumbent on the YCL / CPN-M to ensure that the YCL is not a militarised environment; that the children are not called upon to engage in military or military-type training or in activities that signal an “armed group” status.

Exit strategy

The primary responsibility for the protection of children in Nepal lies with the sovereign Government of Nepal. For obvious reasons, it has needed and continues to need support to realise this responsibility. The CAAFAG programme was designed to be time-limited and, while donors have understood about the need to stay in a state of preparedness for the discharge of the children from cantonments, it would signal a commitment from the GoN if they were to take on some of the financial burden in time. Information from the relevant Ministries, however, is that they are not going to do this. The concern here is that the longer-term dimensions of reintegration may be unsupported, particularly for children who leave the CPN-M at a later date. If this were so, the Programme would be one of a ‘reinsertion’ alone, rather than ‘reintegration’.
8.0 Main Strengths of the Programme

Overall, the main strengths of the Programme are clustered around the fact that it exists at all, that it creates space to address child protection concerns in a context where child protection has not been at the top of any agenda and introduces the concepts and practice of child protection and child participation into the mainstream. It is a catalytic, innovative programme for children who are usually from very marginalised communities or who are marginalised within their communities. As programming for the reintegration of CAAFAG gains in maturity across the globe and many lessons remain to be identified then learned, the Nepal Programme serves as a reminder that every programme has to be context-specific, flexible and responsive.

The programme also allows for some of the more difficult questions in practice to be addressed. Prominent amongst these are the issues of children’s political participation and an apparent tension between Article 12 of the CRC - a child’s right to participate and to have their views respected - and Paragraph 13 of the Consolidated Version of the Paris Commitments\textsuperscript{12} - a commitment by participating states not to permit children to be used for political purposes, including propaganda.

The issues of defining and navigating the real meaning of “community-based” reintegration programming is also exemplified in the Programme, as is the imperative expressed in the Paris Principles for making children and child protection central to peace processes. In this way, the Programme will have a great deal to contribute to the growing body of awareness and skills of child protection actors globally.

The Programme is catalytic in that creates the opportunity to engage with local government about the need and benefits of including children and youth from marginalised communities in economic initiatives, to conduct advocacy with political parties about national responsibilities regarding child rights generally and child protection in particular and to link with other initiatives such as work underway to support women’s human rights, including women’s participation in public life in a post-conflict environment\textsuperscript{13}.

The Programme is innovative in that it allows partners to start changing the discourse from youth as a problem or children as (only) victims to youth as a cohort and youth and children as a potential positive force for sustainable peace in the post-conflict setting. Linked to this, it also deals with the issue of defining successful reintegration by the development of Child Led Indicators\textsuperscript{14} and, more generally, deals with the complex issues of child participation and protection.

8.1 Coordination / alignment with GoN structures and initiatives

Where possible, the Programme is aligned and coordinated with GoN structures and initiatives. This is not universally possible or practical, as there is sometimes a limited

\textsuperscript{12} The drafters of the Paris Commitments meant this to refer to the exploitative use of children by states or other parties to armed conflict after they have left armed groups, as has reportedly happened in a range of countries.

\textsuperscript{13} UN SC Resolution 1325 addresses the latter and there is an opportunity to include older girls

capacity of the local government structures, or the latter are not yet fully engaged with child protection. The evaluation explored but did not find evidence of political bias by local government officials having a negative impact on the Programme. Where local officials were resistant, this manifested in a proclaimed ignorance of the Programme or hiding lack of capacity behind a desire to know more detail about the numbers of children.

9.0 Lessons to be learned

There are, naturally, areas where the Programme could become stronger. As said already, the Programme was designed without a model for a context with the Nepal characteristics of being at the end of a protracted armed conflict with no victorious army and varying degrees and types of association by the children with the armed group.

Programme Design Stage

The Programme was designed with an expectation of mass discharge from the cantonments. Around 11,000 children were expected to need reinsertion into their communities and longer-term reintegration. While the Programme was designed using a community-based assessment, still, little was known in depth about the patterns of recruitment or the experience of children while associated with the armed group.

Prevention

Growing knowledge and experience amongst child protection agencies shows that prevention of recruitment and re-recruitment is both possible (to varying extents) and can form a central part of programming for children affected by armed conflict. While the design of the programme focused on reintegration and acknowledged that this would also prevent re-recruitment, some now feel that a greater emphasis could have been placed on prevention from the beginning. This would have involved more and deeper investigation into the reasons why children joined the CPN-M, the different types of recruitment and use and what information or other resources they needed to prevent them from joining.

Sequencing

There was a tendency (as with many armed conflicts that reach a peace agreement stage) to regard the signing of the CPA as the day when reintegration should start. The disadvantages of this approach are that it fails to take account (and use information from) adults and children who have already reintegrated (or not) into their communities. It also means that reintegration is regarded as a sequential event, rather than something that needs to be part of all stages of the programme, including the placing of children in cantonments, the removal of their weapons and their identification as children. The urgency was to be prepared to receive thousands of children, possibly in a short time-scale, into communities that were in a poor state of infrastructure or economic capacity; communities that, in short, that had been subjected to over 10 years of armed conflict and lack of development.

Complexity
The Programme design was and continues to be steadfastly ‘community-based’ and it was innovative in coming up with ways to encourage communities to accept children in a protective environment and to reduce stigma and distinction between the returning children and their peers, while addressing the severe needs of some other conflict-affected children and maintaining a focus on CAAFAG for Programming and funding purposes. This meant that the Programme became somewhat complex, as evidenced by the fact that some implementing partners found it difficult to explain either to the evaluation team or, apparently, to parents or to schools. The administration of the Programme has also proved a challenge to some implementing partners without intensive mentoring support from UNICEF or INGO staff. In particular, the budgetary structure of the programme – where some money comes from the programme to support children in school and some is expected to come from the school itself - has caused some confusion in some schools and with some implementing partners. The imperative to include non-CAAFAG children, while inspirational in its approach, appears to occasionally led schools into identifying more ‘vulnerable’ (non-CAAFAG) children than CAAFAG.

For future programming, a lesson here is that planning for this sort of programme should take place at an earlier stage, so that more research can be done with those ultimately responsible for implementation at the community level. This could avoid problems with implementation, identify areas of divergence between the design of the programme and the capacity of the partners to implement the programme.

Quotas

All programmes need budgets and to be based on an estimate of need. It became apparent quite quickly, however, that the original figures were underestimates. This was partly because children were leaving the cantonments in small groups or individually and partly because of the emphasis at the beginning of the programme on identifying eligible children. The impact of not being able to meet the changing numbers in a consistent way across the Programme and in a way that is consistent with international standards has been covered elsewhere.

Other agencies and mechanisms

As the armed conflict came to an end and the peace process started again in earnest, other agencies and other mechanisms started to up-scale or to design programmes to fit the current and future context. At this stage, because the Working Group was still in its adolescence, the relationship between the Working Group, the Programme and other mechanisms were not formalised. Of particular note is the mechanism set up pursuant to UN SC Resolution 1612 and the work done by UNFPA on UN SC Resolution 1325 (to ensure the involvement of older girls).

UNDP has developed its own programme for the reintegration of adults, particularly those who have been deemed ‘disqualified’ from eligibility to join the national security system. Unfortunately, the UNDP programme was not designed at the same time, despite the fact that the peace process was underway and again despite international standards for reintegration of ex-combatants. This has meant that there may be a missed opportunity to find ways to make the Programme and the UNDP Programme aligned to take account of the reality that most of the ex-combatants are in the youth cohort. Tensions are likely to arise for
‘disqualified’ cadres when some see themselves as eligible for the UNDP Programme and others for the UNICEF programme when in fact they all consider themselves (rightly) as youth. This becomes particularly acute the longer the ex-combatants are held in the cantonments and the less information they receive from the respective agencies, due to lack of access to the cantonments.

It was regrettable that UNDP was unable to keep any appointments to meet the evaluator to discuss how programming could be better aligned.

10.0 Capacities

Protection

As Nepal does not have, traditionally, adopt a child protection culture, it is a relatively new area for most national implementing partners and national staff of international partners. There is a need, therefore, for quite intensive and continuous mentoring and support. Although, as stated above, international NGOs have a wealth of experience and experience from around the globe, the evaluation found that this was not always being transmitted to the field level to support national staff. The reasons for this include the few international staff members able to be factored into INGOs’ budgets. The problem is also circular. If Kathmandu-based staff are not able to travel to the field, they will not be aware of potential problems or issues as they arise and are not able to intervene. As the Programme currently stands, this means that, in some cases, UNICEF staff members are taking on the role of mentor and support to national implementing partners of international organisations.

Livelihoods

As stated earlier, the Programme has invested a great deal in training staff of implementing partners. This is positive both for the Programme and in terms of building a critical mass of people who know about child protection, psycho-social interventions and reintegration. Given the prominence of the vocational training and livelihoods aspects of the Programme, there is relatively little capacity across the Programme in this field which has resulted in this area being the least strong of all the components. This is covered in more detail below.

Participation

As already stated, genuine, effective child participation is a difficult area and one in which there is little common knowledge amongst child protection or reintegration actors. The tendency (globally, not only in Nepal) is to err on one side or the other – and sometimes both at once – of allowing children to dictate the programme even where this may not be in their best interests or ignoring their views in a belief that they cannot know what is in their own best interests. The constraint of time and limited staff capacity also militates against effective child participation, although, where it is done well, it can save time and money spent on making mistakes.

Information v Knowledge

The Programme has gathered a great deal of information from and about the children. There are numerous forms with categories for many characteristics of the children, clearly designed to aid programming. The challenge here is to translate this into knowledge that can
be used for programming, advocacy or to inform partners’ work. For instance, data can be collected that describes how many children are registered for reintegration in one school. It is then necessary to know, for instance, whether this accurately reflects the number of children who left the school to join the armed group, whether those children are from that area or another one, whether there is a clustering of ages of those children and so on. Currently, due to pressures of time as well as analytical ability, information is translated to knowledge usually only when specific knowledge is sought and questions asked.

**Capacity of community structures**

The evaluation found that most community-based structures and mechanisms were enthusiastic about incorporating child protection work for the reintegration of children. They vary widely in their capacity, however, depending on the input they have received and the commitment of the leadership. Para-legal committees, for instance have relatively good capacity to take on child reintegration issues as they are already embedded in the community and connected with children and women. Some School Management Committees, particularly where there is a strong school Principal, can also be good points of contact for providing information about children, encouraging parents and the community at large to be accepting of the children and monitoring the progress of the children who have been reinserted into school.

**Gender**

The most frequent response to the evaluation questions about gender and reintegration was “It’s more difficult for girls”. While this is certainly true in many instances, it does not address how and why it is true or what can be done to make it less so. Nor does it address the situation for boys, who may face different pressures upon returning or in terms of (re)recruitment by other groups or the YCL. A lack of gender analysis and tools to deal with gender issues was particularly apparent in the vocational training component as well as in a perceived helplessness in dealing with issues of early marriage or the reintegration of girls who had had children while with the armed group or shortly thereafter. National implementing partners showed good will and sensitivity towards the more delicate issues that girls may face and it is clear that this is an area for more capacity-building of partners’ staff as well as community-based organisations.

**International organisations’ capacities**

Effective partnerships depend on the capacities of partner organisations, as well as the Programme organisations. So, for instance, if there is to be joint work or collaboration with UNFPA or UNDP, these organisations need to have the capacity to make the partnership happen; to understand the reintegration of children and the relevance to their own work. For instance, the evaluation found that staff members of partner international organisations were unaware of the Paris Principles or relevant other international standards. As with other country operations, there can be a tendency for international organisations to think strictly within their own mandate and to regard their mandate as a limitation rather than an opportunity for collaboration. For example, given that most of the girls associated with the CPN-M are adolescent, there is an opportunity for the UNICEF and the UNFPA programmes to work together closely on issues such as reaching girls for reproductive health issues.
through the reintegration programmes or to include girls in UNFPA’s work on women’s political participation through UN SC Resolution 1325.

**11.0 Implementation**

**Gender**

As mentioned above, gender considerations apply to boys and girls and to their parents. The Paris Principles are detailed and helpful about the special situation of girls (while less so about the particular considerations for boys). Compared to some other country contexts, girls are relatively visible through the programme although it is not known how many girls or boys have been associated with the CPN-M nor how many girls were already reintegrated in one way or another before the Programme commenced. It is certainly correct that girls are more likely to be stigmatised by their association – not so much with the armed group per se but with boys and men outside of parental control, particularly where those boys and men are from different castes. The evaluation heard frequently that girls may lose their entire character by association with the armed group and may have to be sent away where no-one knows them in order to live an ordinary life. Anecdotal evidence suggests that girls leaving the armed group are more at risk of early marriage, both to avoid any stigma associated with their time spent with the armed group and as a means of social control over girls who may have come back with different ideas about their own lives. It is likely that the girls who have been married early are invisible to the programme, although there were occasional reports of married girls who had continued with their schooling or training with support from the programme partners.

Gender issues are evident in every area of reintegration. In order to ensure gender sensitivity and that the Programme does not contradict the non-discrimination core principle of the CRC, it is necessary for all staff members to be applying the ‘gender lens’ at all times.

**Inclusion / exclusion errors**

The evaluation found that errors were almost always exclusion rather than inclusion. A sceptical view of the broad definition of “child associated with an armed force or armed group” is that this will encourage children who have been with the armed group for an hour’s ‘teaching’ or who have had no more contact than everyone else in their village to seek support through the reintegration programme. The evaluation included talking with many children receiving support and their peers and found no instances of children who should not have received support.

It is more likely, therefore, that children who are eligible for support have not been identified. This may be because of fear of stigma (although the whole community always seems to know that a child has joined the armed group), because the child does now know that s/he is eligible.

**Political interference**

Interference by political parties or their representatives can take the form of active obstruction, passive resistance, wilful ignorance about the Programme or, even more passively, apathy towards the children in the Programme. The evaluation received information from implementing partners about all these manifestations, almost all of which
were described in political terms. Intimidation of staff members, particularly social workers
was not uncommon, while other political party members would apparently adopt a position of
not knowing or not caring about the Programme, apparently because they regarded the
children as members of the CPN-M, rather than as children who had experienced a violation
of their rights. Largely, the implementing partners dealt well, astutely and pragmatically with
these types of interference. It is recommended, however, that where political leaders claim
that they know nothing about the programme or apparently deliberately ‘misunderstand’ it,
that contact should take on a more formalised approach, with written records of meetings
and telephone calls.

Uncertainty about release from cantonments

This is a threat to the effectiveness of the Programme. Large proportions of the budget have
been spent in unavoidable preparedness for the release of large numbers of children and
valuable staff time taken up with identifying suitable buildings for the interim care centres,
pre-recruiting appropriate staff and liaising with communities to ensure receptivity of a large
group of militarised children. Each time this preparation happens, with no result, the
credibility of the Programme diminishes, potential staff (for security, house-parents,
counselling etc.) are less likely to remain available and staff members become dispirited. It
would be wrong, however, to drop the preparedness in case the advocacy efforts do pay off
and suddenly a large group – if not all – the minors are released.

Nor would it be appropriate for UNICEF or UNMIN to agree with the CPN-M that the children
should stay in the cantonments until the election. As already stated, each day that the
children are in the cantonments they are being prevented from commencing their
reintegration, are losing education and are being kept in effective captivity.

Realism about capacities

There is a tension between juggling all the requirements of the Programme and remaining
realistic about implementing partners’ capacities. If those who have stopped registering
children start again, register and then have to support another, say, 30 children at the same
time as continuing the work with those who are already in the Programme and preparing for
mass release, this could put a strain on the already stretched capacities and will necessitate
increased staffing and other resources.

UNICEF: Cross-programme collaboration and coordination

Within UNICEF, there is good collaboration and coordination with the Education programme
and the programmes are considered to be complementary. The Education section does not
consider it contradictory, for instance, that the CAAFAG programme gives indirect support to
children through individual schools while the Education programme mainly supports the GoN
through the Ministry of Education, because most of the CAAFAG programming takes place
in areas where the Education section is not so active. Moreover, there is recognition that the
CAAFAG programme is not an education programme, but a protection programme with an
education component.

There is room for more collaboration within UNICEF for instance with the Water and
Sanitation (WASH) section, particularly with regard to supporting communities where the
Programme is conducting sensitisation programmes or where the interim care centres are based.

**Existing Partnerships**

These are generally positive, thanks to the CAAFAG Working Group mechanism. There are still areas of tension, however, that need to be worked out if possible. For instance, it is important that parents of children still with the CPN-M or involuntarily with the YCL know which organisation to approach and are confident that something will be done and they will be kept informed. At present, there is confusion between the roles of UNMIN Child Protection Section, the OHCHR and UNICEF. It is recommended that, as the operational agency with a child protection mandate, UNICEF takes the lead on child protection ‘events’, bringing in UNMIN and the OHCHR as necessary and where they have expertise to offer.

UNICEF has a proactive approach towards forging partnerships, including with the World Food Programme and the International Labour Organisation. Both these organisations can contribute expertise, resources and other input to the Programme. Also, UNICEF has been active in making links with the World Bank and its poverty alleviation, infrastructure and economic development programming.

**Exploring new partnerships**

In addition to existing partnerships, there are opportunities to strike up partnerships with less obvious organisations. The World Bank is engaged in a country-wide Poverty Alleviation Strategy which could form a strong partnership with regard to income generating activities and vocational training. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has approached UNICEF to join the CAAFAG Working Group. This is a positive development and will bring much needed expertise in the area of livelihoods. At local levels, representatives of line Ministries outside the usual repertoire could be explored and developed.

**12.0 Programme Components**

**12.1 Education**

**Impact on children**

“If I did not have this support, I would leave school and rejoin the Party”

Children in receipt of the direct support are universally positive and there are no records of children who have received the support subsequently leaving before they would be expected to. The financial amount provided in kind to each child is small (NRs 2,000) which usually goes towards uniforms and school stationery. The school fees are also met, although the school is also asked to contribute to keep the child in school up to Grade 10. The Partners use the direct assistance as an opportunity to talk to the child’s family about the importance of school while delivering the items.

Teachers and parents state that the returning children are more determined than before they left and than their peers to make all they can of the educational opportunity and to

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15 Quote from 15 year old boy in school in Central District
participate fully in school life, including the Child Club. During the course of the evaluation, several CAAFAG were seen engaged in leadership roles within the Child Club and all were clearly pleased to be at school and working hard.

The direct support is different from scholarships in that it is for secondary schools and is targeted at particularly vulnerable children. It is also apparent that it is the intersection between their previous ‘associated’ status and the support they receive to stay at school, combined with the social work input with the families that makes the difference.

Children who were interviewed said that there was a relationship between the support to girls and early marriage. Firstly, supporting parents to keep their girls in school reduced the likelihood of early marriage because it was not such a drain on their resources and the girl was more likely to make a better match if she was educated. Secondly, keeping the girl in the school environment means that there are teachers, social workers and parents of other children in the Child Club and classes that can help the parents to understand the benefits of delaying marriage.

**Impact on schools**

Schools report a positive experience of having the reintegrating children, again stressing that they are hard-working and diligent. The schools are also glad, of course, of the indirect support they receive in terms of financial support to renovation or repairs. They also appreciate that non-CAAFAG ‘vulnerable’ children benefit directly from the Programme.

It is School Management Committees (SMCs) who decide on how to spend the indirect support. These are constituted from the community and so the latter hears immediately about the benefits to the school – and therefore all the community’s children – deriving from the Programme. In the earlier days of the Programme, there were some problems with SMCs choosing inappropriate ways of spending the support such as photocopiers where there was no electricity and the evaluation was shown a classroom roof that had been built without resources to complete the walls or windows. This could be due to misunderstanding (deliberate or otherwise) about the limitations of the Programme support or the playing out of political / power dynamics within the SMCs. Whatever the cause, it is important that SMCs are helped to make sensible and appropriate choices that benefit the children at school.

**Informal education**

The Programme design included a component for informal education. Unfortunately, this has never been implemented. It is recommended that UNICEF child protection and education sections work together with the International Rescue Committee and World Education to investigate a way of incorporating this component, particularly for the older minors who should be discharged from the cantonments.

Many schools and their associated Child Clubs make every effort to ensure that there is no discrimination or favour shown to children on the basis of caste, financial status or family background. This is particularly so in schools which have a higher proportion of children from scheduled castes or very poor families who they try and support to be ambitious and achieving. This ethos, and the effectiveness of the Programme, will face a major challenge when children from the cantonments arrive in their villages (and therefore at school) with large quantities of cash by way of their stipend. It is an urgent recommendation that UNMIN
and UNICEF work together to find a way to avoid the negative impact of stipends, at least on the educational life of the children and on the schools they attend.

12.2 Vocational Training and Income Generation

This is the least strong part of the Programme and will need a ‘root and branch’ overhaul to make it effective and complementary with the rest of the components. The intention is positive; to give older children an alternative to education if they are reluctant to attend school, are under particular economic pressure at home to start earning or are not comfortable at school for another reason such as being a parent themselves or too traumatised to mix well with other children in a school setting.

The idea is that children are provided with intensive skills-based training that will enable them to get work or to start their own businesses in the community. For girls, particularly, the idea is that the skills would enable them to be independent if they needed to leave the family or community and that, because they were economically viable, they would be less likely to be married at an early age.

An apparent lack of capacity across the CAAFAG Working Group at the design phase of this component of the Programme is having negative consequences at the implementation stage. The objectives of this component were not clear. If it was to provide economic self-sufficiency for older children who were not able or willing to attend school, then it needed much more in the way of analysis, careful targeting and support for associated skills such as business management. If, on the other hand, the objective was to give older children something interesting to do that may be useful in some way, this should have been made clearer to the children so that their expectations were not raised.

Across UNICEF and its implementing partners, there was insufficient expertise in market analysis, opportunity mapping, gender awareness or business management. It also appears that the desire to take children’s views seriously and to listen to their expression of what they wanted to do took precedence over realistic, sustainably targeted training. For instance, many boys stated that they wanted to become drivers and so they received a months training. Many are now disappointed as they were either too young to obtain a driver’s licence or are unable to obtain work that involves driving because they live far away from roads or cars. For girls, most accepted the offer of tailoring training, although again they are too young to set up their own business (in some cases too young to work).

Not many children are now receiving the training, the vast majority of whom of which are girls – of which most are doing tailoring or beautician training. The evaluation consultant only saw and heard (from national implementing partners) of girls doing tailoring, although she was assured by international partners that other girls are being trained in electrics.

The girls that are receiving the tailoring training are enthusiastic about it and are looking forward to setting up their own businesses. Unfortunately, however, they are receiving no training in business management, some are illiterate and innumerate and not receiving any remedial training for this while still others are under 16 years old. Accepted practice states that children less than 14 years old should always be at school, not in work; where children are in training this should be balanced with educational input appropriate to their age and abilities.
The girls and their parents also expressed concern that the training was not long enough to teach them enough to really get viable work, let alone to set up in business.

The budget for this component was also under-estimated. The allocation for each child is around NRs 8,000 which cannot include literacy, numeracy, business skills or life-skills training.

The gender dimensions of the vocational training need more attention. Although the implementing partners said that the girls had chosen tailoring, the girls said this was the only option they had been given. It is right that training has to be realistic and that it is futile to train children to do work in an area where they will never get work, but there is a balance and there are innovative ways of involving children in non-gender-specific training and work.

The psycho-social aspect of the vocational training is positive. All the girls seemed pleased to be with each other and some said these were the only friends they had since they returned from the cantonments. For deeply traumatised children, going to the training may be the only opportunity they have for making contact with people outside the family. It is recommended, however, that other ways be found to meet these functions, such as by setting up girls’ clubs outside schools or intensive support to deeply traumatised children; vocational training has a psycho-social dimension but it should not be its raison d’etre.

The protection dimensions of vocational training are complex and sensitive. For instance, normal practice states that community-based reintegration should not take children outside their communities yet, for some of these children, to attend training would involve a long and dangerous journey unless it is residential. When girls are in any residential facilities, there should be adequate security, including female security staff. This was not the case in the residential training visited during the evaluation, although a young woman teacher did act as the girls’ mentor and confidant. At another training facility visited, the girls had two hour journeys to complete either side of their training sessions, yet little attention seemed to have been given to their safety travelling to and from home.

It is recommended, therefore, that this component receive an overhaul, with the input and advice of a vocational training expert or that the ILO is asked to take it over in partnership with UNICEF.

With regard to income generation, this is an area that, again, needs more development. There are many exciting opportunities with development partners such as the World Bank. Initiatives such as the rural electrification and livestock programmes create opportunities both for training and for income generation while community-run initiatives such as burgeoning cooperative movements in areas that were heavily controlled by the Maoists create opportunities for apprenticeships and training for older children and youth. It is recommended that UNICEF work closely with the World Bank, the Agricultural Development Bank, relevant Ministries and the ILO to explore opportunities in this regard.

12.3 Psycho-social

This is a relatively strong component of the Programme, particularly where implementing partners’ staff members have received intensive training. It was clear that the the confidence and ability of the social workers16 was in direct proportion to the training they had received.

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16 The term ‘Social worker’ here includes ‘Social mobilisers’
The challenges here are Nepal has not invested in psychological health and it has not been a recognised discipline. This means that the concept of psycho-social assistance is new to most people and that there is little in the way of referral mechanisms or networks. The responsibility upon implementing staff members can be onerous, therefore, particularly given that even a few months training cannot create an expert in psycho-social work.

The international NGO HealthNet Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) has been largely responsible for the training aspect of this component of the Programme and it is positive that they have been able to use their extensive local knowledge, international expertise and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines to ensure the high quality of this component.

Children, parents and teachers alike were positive in their reporting of how the social workers were able to support and help them. Children say that their social worker helps them to communicate with their parents and gives them an independent adult in whom to confide where necessary. Parents also know that they can talk to the social workers and teachers notice the difference when children have had support from the social workers.

As well as the support to individual children and their families, the training and experience the social workers have received spreads out into the community as a whole and starts to create an aware, protective environment for children. There is a growing cohort of people, based in the community, who are aware of psycho-social issues, able to address basic issues for children and young people and to help families to cope with children with difficult behaviours or experiences. This is particularly important where there is so little in the way of psycho-social provision in the statutory sector or networks across the informal sector.

Because of the way in which the children have left the CPN-M, as individuals or small groups and over an extended period of time rather than all at once so they can be ‘processed’ through the interim care centres, the social workers have large case-loads spread over geographically wide areas. While some children and their families may not need much support, the social worker has to visit regularly if only to find out that they are not needed so much. Some social workers reported that their case loads are so big that they cannot give adequate time to each child and they worry that they may miss signs of greater need, despite their training.

In this area, gender issues tended to be addressed in the “It’s worse for girls” approach and there is room for more attention to the psycho-social needs of boys. An example was demonstrated of good links that have been made with provision for girls and women who have been subjected to gender-based violence. While this is positive, it is important not to lose sight of the boys.

The challenge with this component is to maintain the momentum that has been reached, support the training that has already been given and find ways to overcome the risks that the social workers end up being spread too thinly. It is also important for the standard of training to be made uniform so that all implementing partners’ staff members receive the same quality and length of training. It is recommended that UNICEF, TPO, the WHO and UNFPA work together on these issues and to start to integrate the psycho-social work done through this programme into other areas.
12.4 Community Sensitisation, Mobilisation and Awareness-Raising

This is a central and important component of the programme. It has helped to identify children who are eligible for support by the programme, to increase the likelihood that problems with reintegration can be identified at an early stage and to reassure parents and children that the community is ready to receive children back home.

Nepali society is family and community-centred and so no reintegration of children is possible unless the family and community accepts them and facilitates their reintegration. In recognition of this, and in order to ensure that the Programme is community-based in line with best practice, a central component of the Programme is sensitisation and awareness-raising of the community. This is largely done by social workers going out into the community and literally talking with individuals. In addition, community meetings are held where the Programme is described, questions answered and the community has a chance to raise concerns. Several of these meetings may be necessary before the community is ready to take on returning children.

Community sensitisation also takes place through community-based organisations (CBOs) by organising community events and by using the leadership of these organisations.

The sensitisation part of the Programme is the most nebulous, as it involves so much informal contact on a repeated basis with a range of actors, from individual parents to chairs of CBOs. Implementing partners find it difficult to articulate, compared to the education component which is easier to document and to track.

Evaluating the impact of sensitisation, mobilisation and awareness-raising is challenging for the above reason and because, if done well, people who have had their awareness raised may not be aware that it was due to another person’s input, but will think that they just ‘changed their mind’ or gradually came to be more aware. It is also difficult to ascribe awareness to one set of inputs, particularly in a situation where information and awareness about CAAFAG is starting to be prominent.

The international NGO Search for Common Ground has been using the radio as a powerful media to discuss issues of children’s association with armed groups. Although the evaluation did not delve deeply into community take-up and perception of these radio programmes, national implementing partners were aware of them and wanted to do something similar in their areas.

Cultural factors can be both advantageous to this element of the programme or a constraint. Nepali society is often close-knit where everybody knows each other’s situation. This can help to ensure that sensitisation spreads quickly and so reduce the resources (human and time) taken to sensitise an entire village. On the other hand, some ethnic groups have expectations that prevent them from helping each other, even where they are related. The caste system and related mechanisms of marginalisation and discrimination may also mean that sensitisation has to be targeted directly at different groups. Certainly, this component, particularly, has to be tailored to fit the context at the very local level. What works in the far West may well not work in the East and vice versa.

The missing element to community-based awareness-raising was anything visual. Amongst the commercial advertisements and the signs proclaiming the YCL, the Programme and its key messages are conspicuous by their absence. The recommendation here is not to have
controversial, provocative messages, but simple, pro-child and pro-protection messages designed in a culturally appropriate manner to visually bring the message home that all children in Nepal are equally welcome, valuable and precious to their parents, communities and society as a whole.

13.0 Conclusions

This programme is innovative, ambitious and catalytic. It addresses directly the realities of children’s association with the CPN-M and does not pretend to import models from other parts of the world. The Programme was designed in the context of a peace agreement that contained express provision for the release of all children from the Maoist Army. This commitment has not been honoured and so the Programme has had to adapt time and again to changing circumstances, both for individual children and for the prospect that there may, yet, be a mass discharge from the cantonments.

Strong, systematic, consistent and sustained advocacy is needed by UNICEF and all its partners to the GoN and the CPN-M to obtain the discharge of all the minors in the cantonments and to work out problems such as the agreement to pay stipends so that they do as little as possible that is contrary to children’s protection rights.

The Programme has many strengths and is an example of best practice in terms of community-based reintegration. There are areas that need strengthening as a matter of urgency, particularly the vocational training and income generation component and in sending out clear messages to the community that all children are welcome and valuable.

UNICEF is fortunate in having strong partners in-country, both national and international organisations. The challenge now will be build on this collaboration, avoid competition and duplication while reaching out to form new partnerships, particularly in the economic sectors.

14.0 Recommendations

To UNMIN, UN agencies and Departments, the GoN, donors and international and national NGOs:

• Recognise that the association of children with the CPN-M is an egregious violation of children’s rights according to international law and determine to bring about its cessation;
• Decide how the delivery of the stipend to minors leaving the cantonments can be conducted in a way that is consistent with international standards – particularly the core principles of the CRC;
• Decide on the core message that the community should receive about CAAFAG and to deliver it, by visual means as well as advocacy and community sensitisation;
• Place children and youth at the centre of programming for the transition to peace, taking cognisance of their capacities and contribution;

To UNMIN, UNICEF and other UN agencies and departments:
• Adopt a robust, consistent and sustained advocacy approach with the CPN-M and GoN to effect the immediate release of remaining minors, prevent their recruitment into any groups using violence for political ends and to effect their reintegration into civilian society;
• Position UNICEF as a key actor across the UN system as the lead global agency for child protection;
• Decide on how the most appropriate response to child protection issues and to plan accordingly;
• Collaborate and align programmes in the best interests of children and youth and taking account of their capacities and strengths;

To the CAAFAG Working Group and donors:
• Address the transition of programme from short-term emergency response to a more complex, slower-time programme;
• Register all CAAFAG; Budget for children above ‘quota’ and support as necessary
• Maintain and extend dialogue with all parties with influence over the reintegration of children, including any emerging groups and all political leaders;
• Simplify programme wherever possible;
• Continue and extend advocacy with political leaders and GoN representatives. Where necessary, formalise these interactions;
• Coordinate and build partnerships with other programmes including targeted budget support, poverty alleviation strategies, work on UNSC Resolution 1325;
• Continue to build national capacity;
• Develop strategy for addressing gender issues;
• Find an alternative to the current modality of the vocational training component so that it can become viable and realise its potential. Investigate the possibility of the ILO or an expert NGO taking the lead, with appropriate resources;
• Further develop the relationship with the World Bank, relevant ministries and departments to ensure the effectiveness of the economic self-sufficiency / income-generation component, recognising the contribution that youth have to offer;
• Investigate the possibility of reviving the informal education component that was in the programme design;
• Ensure that the psycho-social component is made uniform in terms of the training received by implementing partners and that they are sufficiently resourced to continue building the capacity of the community in this regard;
• Develop ways of complementing the psycho-social aspects of the current vocational training component such as Child or Girls’ clubs outside school;
• Develop an information flow and advocacy strategy, including public information;
• Develop a youth & peace-building strategy.
Annex A: Evaluation Terms of Reference (TOR)

Terms of Reference

August 2007

Evaluation of the UNICEF Program on the Release, Return and Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) in Nepal

1. Background

The release, return and reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) is an integral component of stabilizing Nepal and implementing the comprehensive peace agreement signed in November 2006. Children have been recruited and used by the various armed forces and groups throughout the conflict and currently verification and registration processes are on going in 7 cantonments sites, with the involvement the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) UNDP and UNICEF, which will allow the identification of children within the CPN-M for their release.

The UNICEF Program on the Release, Return and Reintegration of CAAFAG was launched against a general backdrop of the needs to strongly advocate for the release of the CAAFAG children and the design of appropriate projects which will respond to their protection needs, not only for proper reintegration but also to prevent further recruitment.

UNICEF coordinated the interventions through an inter – agency forum named “CAAFAG Working Group” comprising of international and national NGOs such as Save the Children Allianz, International Rescue Committee (IRC) International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), Search for Common Ground and other UN agencies such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The group meets on a regular basis at national and regional levels to: a) develop common vision, b) harmonize polices and procedures across key protection program areas (advocacy messages, reintegration guidelines, family tracing and reunification, community sensitization, etc…), c) address challenges d) take coordinated action for the children in the program and e) see how they could strengthen their cooperation.

UNICEF further in collaboration with Human Rights organization advocates for the immediate release and the end of recruitment and use of children in any capacity with all armed forces and armed groups. The CAAFAG Working Group works closely with the SC 1612 Task Force in order to reinforce child’s rights violation documentation and monitoring and develop appropriate response for the protection of children.
UNICEF was allocated with funds from the Japanese government, ECHO and DFID to respond to the needs of the CAAFAG and activities are currently being implemented nationwide in partnership with international and national NGOs.

2. Purpose

The evaluation is intended to provide an analysis and review of the UNICEF program to address and re-enforce the protection of CAAFAG. The results of the proposed evaluation will then be used to inform both policy and programming and will therefore feed into shaping the future orientation of the program. It will also provide the various donors with evidence of the impact of the project and inform their funding decisions.

3. Objectives

Overall Objective:

To provide an overall assessment of the Release, Return and Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) in Nepal

Specific Objectives:

1. To carry out literature review of existing documentation of the program in Nepal
2. To describe the release, return and reintegration process of children in Nepal, highlighting those areas that prove to limit access of children to services or reintegration support and those areas which facilitated the process.
3. To evaluate the impact that the CAAFAG program had on the children in their transition from being part of the fighting forces to returning home, including a consideration for a comparison between the non-CAAFAG children in the community and CAAFAG
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of the various components of the reintegration strategy as defined in the reintegration guidelines and implemented by the UNICEF implementing partners
5. To evaluate the application of the international major instruments defining and directing the CAAFAG program, their application against the prevailing country situation. This will also include the “Paris Guidelines” and how they may guide the future of the programming.
6. To evaluate the gender dimensions of the programme: what has been the effectiveness of the programs on girl children who were associated with fighting forces; and how boys gender roles are also affecting their experience of the programme
7. To evaluate the social impact (including protection issues) of the payment of the stipend (salaries) on the children who did receive it. (This objective might varied according to the political context, eg. Whether children will be receiving the cash or not)
8. To assess the impact that UNICEF, the CAAFAG Working Group members and the SC 1612 Task force had on the major decision making regarding the implementation of the program highlighting where particular advocacy could have improved the way the programme was implemented for children. Hence, examine contribution of the work on 1612 Task force in the CAAFAG program
9. To highlight constraints/challenges faced by UNICEF and partner agencies in achieving goals
10. To assess the role of the UNMIN and UNDP in the children’s release process and role of other partners such as UNFPA, WFP, WHO. The focus will be on how the collaboration assisted or hindered progress in the release, return and reintegration of the CAAFAG (the nature of collaboration, quality and outcomes of such collaboration; constraints/challenges
11. To assess the extent to which donor investment has contributed to achievement of key child protection agencies in responding effectively to the issues related to the CAAFAG program
12. To draw lessons for future strategies and partnerships in relation the program objectives

4. Scope/Focus

a) Organizational Scope

• The primary focus of the evaluation will be on the UNICEF Program (strategies and activities) and its effects on the responses provided to the issues related to the CAAFAG by taking into consideration following area of interventions:
  o Advocacy and prevention
  o Return and release
  o Capacity building
  o Care and protection
  o Reintegration
  o Reconciliation and peace building

• In examining these effects, the evaluation will extend to examining the nature and quality of the partnership between UNICEF and the partners associated to the CAAFAG Working Group, placing particular focus on UNICEF’s coordinating role.
• The evaluation will also examine the partnership established with the Task force working on the SC 1612 as well as with UNMIN (more specifically with the Child Protection Section)
• The evaluation will examine all of the results specified in the defined strategies to achieve them.

b) Evaluations Questions

The evaluation will address the following key questions:

• How effective were activities carried out in achieving the targeted results? What has been the real benefit for the “direct” (CAAFAG) and “indirect” beneficiaries?
• How relevant were targeted results, strategies and activities that appear in the program and what have been additional outcomes during the life cycle of the project.
• How sustainable are the overall effort to strengthen inter-agency collaboration around questions related to the CAAFAG?
• How well has the overall effort been coordinated at different levels – national, regional and districts levels?

5. Process and methodology

The evaluation methodology

• A desk review
• Field visits to project sites entailing further documentary review as well as key informant interviews with children, their parents (guardians) and UNICEF’s implementing partners agencies staff and selected external key informants; and
• A consultation with a selection of staff from different levels of the CAAFAG Working Group for validation of findings and participatory analysis of implications and possible response;
• Key informant and focus group interviews (face-to-face, telephone and conference calling):
  - Selected agencies’ CO Representatives, Senior Programme Officers, Programme Managers
  - UNICEF child protection partners agencies
  - Line ministries (Ministry of Social Welfare, education, peace and reconstruction, etc…)
  - External key informants such as UNMIN, UNDP, WHO, UNFPA, OCHA
  - Embassies
  - OHCHR
  - Donor community (ECHO, DFID, Japan, CIDA, SIDA, French cooperation, etc…)
• Possible piggy-backing on planned meetings with field staff participation for additional consultations or focus groups (e.g. Regional CAAFGA Group meetings) and
• E-mail exchange with a reference group at key stages to validate findings and conclusions, and to comment on final draft.

The evaluation will take place in three phases and will include the following key stages and milestones:

a) A preparatory phase (10 days in December 2007) will include:

• A thorough review of available documentation which includes: documentation on the evolving CAAFAG context in Nepal, strategies and training documents developed, notes of various CAAFAG working group meetings, projects reports etc…)
• Design of methodology, planning travel timetable and identifying key sites to visit, people to interview.
• The review and further development of questions for analysis as necessary.
• The provision of an inception report which identifies the key issues, maps out the way forward and raises any issues of concern

b) The data collection phase and analysis (3 weeks in January2008)

• Questionnaire based survey of various staff (English)
• Focus groups (child protection forum, village’s development committees, child welfare committees, children, etc…)
• Key informant interviews at national, regional, and district levels
• Participation in meetings that coincide with the field phase of the evaluation: CAAFAG Working Group Meeting

c) The analysis and reporting phase will include (2 weeks in February 2008):

• Quantitative and qualitative analysis of data;
• E-mail and conference call consultation with other reference group members.
• Preparation of a draft evaluation;
• Circulation of the draft report to reference group members and selected other staff for comment;
• Preparation of the final report.

6. Accountabilities and Management structure

a) The Consultant:

The consultant will be responsible for:

• Reviewing the existing literature and proposing an evaluation methodology including data collection tools.
• Managing the process of interviews and review of project documents to ensure sufficient information is gathered to make an informed assessment in line with the evaluation’s objectives.
• Preparation of draft and final reports.

b) The CAAFAG Child Protection Officer:

• The CAAFAG Child Protection Officer will link with the reference group (see below) but will be responsible for:
• Facilitating the selection of the evaluator, the definition of the TOR and managing the contract.
• Agreeing with the Consultant at the end of the first phase (as described above) on the methodology and sharing this methodology with the reference group.
• Ensuring the Consultant has access to all necessary documents to inform the evaluation and that the reference group has opportunity to input into this.
• Organizing and managing with partners the field aspect of the evaluation, including logistics and ensuring relevant persons are available for interview/discussion.
• Reviewing the first draft of the evaluation and facilitating the process of feedback from the reference group.
• Validation of the evaluation and distribution to key stakeholders.

c) The Reference Group to the evaluation

The group will be comprised of representatives from the CAAFAG Working Group and will be responsible for:

• Approval on key aspects of evaluation design, methodology and process;
• Ensuring the evaluation process involves key stakeholders adequately to ensure their agency’s ownership of analysis and recommendations;
• Support the organization of the field visits of the Consultant both in terms of planning of site visits and arranging interviews/focus group discussions.
• Feedback to the draft evaluation report based on coordinated consultation within their agencies.
• Approval of the final report in terms of meeting TORs.
• Decision on a post-evaluation dissemination strategy.
7. Final Products

The final product is a report of ca 30 pages with an Executive Summary of no more than 5 pages presenting:

- Findings, analysis and conclusions in line with the areas outlined in the TOR
- Clear recommendations for policy and programming for CAAFAG, for future orientation
- A list of annexes (Terms of reference, list of interviewees, sites visited, maps of areas covered, abbreviations)
- An electronic version of all documents

8. Person profile

The evaluator will have skills and experience that include the following:

- Masters degree in any of following disciplines: sociology, social work, psychology, community development, human rights
- Minimum of ten years experience in humanitarian work
- Experience of DDRR programming with focus on children
- Experience in the evaluation of programs at both national and international levels
- Experience in programming for children affected by armed conflict
- Experience of the country or knowledge of the political situation in Nepal
- Work or consultancy experience in developing countries
- Demonstrated experience in quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis
- Demonstrated experience in working in political sensitive environment and in dealing with political sensitive questions
- Work or consultancy experience with a UN and/ or a major international agency
- Good communication, negotiation and writing skills.

Annex B: Inception Report
EVALUATION OF THE UNICEF PROGRAM ON THE RELEASE, RETURN, AND REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED FORCES AND ARMED GROUPS (CAAFAG) IN NEPAL

INCEPTION REPORT

Introduction

After a decade of internal armed conflict in Nepal, a fragile peace agreement is in place between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN-M) and the Government of Nepal (GoN). Signed in 2006, this peace agreement contains explicit provisions relating to the release, return and reintegration of children who were associated with either party to the armed conflict.

UNICEF and its international and national partners have devised a programme for the release, return and reintegration of children associated with the CPN-M and other armed forces and armed groups. To date, however, no children have been formally released from the cantonment sites. Children who have left the CPN-M have done so spontaneously or have been requested to leave the cantonments.

UNICEF now seeks to evaluate the programme’s progress so far and to use this to inform future policy and programming for CAAFAG in Nepal.

National context

Nepal is the poorest country in Asia\textsuperscript{17}. It is chronically food insecure and is characterised by widespread social exclusion and discrimination on the basis of gender, caste and ethnicity. The armed conflict – in no small part fuelled by these factors – has also contributed to Nepal’s parlous economic state. Health and education facilities in the rural areas have been largely destroyed or fallen into disrepair. Almost half Nepal’s children are malnourished to some extent and many thousands are engaged in child labour contrary to international law, including domestic servitude, casual manual labour and prostitution.

Thousands of girls and boys (40/60\%) have been recruited and used by the CPN-M as active combatants, porters, messengers, recruiters of other children and adults and fundraisers. Other children have been apparently associated with the national armed forces, usually as a result of real or perceived membership of the CPN-M. Yet more children have been detained and punished contrary to international standards for alleged membership of the CPN-M.

Years of poor governance have also led to a weak legal and judicial system. There is no effective juvenile justice system and child protection legislation is either absent or poorly implemented. There is little confidence between the security system (police, national armed forces and judiciary) and the population – particularly those from ‘lower’ castes or in the more remote areas.

Education has been identified as a significant factor in the recruitment and retention of children by the armed group and in programming for reintegration. School infrastructure has fallen into disrepair, teachers were targeted and children were often recruited or otherwise targeted by one party to the armed conflict or the other at or on their way to school.

\textsuperscript{17} Asia Development Bank report December 2007
The Peace Process

There have been moves towards a peace process since 2001, all of which have faltered. In 2006, a widespread people’s protest led to a retraction of government policies and created the opportunity for final, coherent negotiations between the GoN and the CPN-M. The resultant Comprehensive Peace Agreement was followed by an Interim Constitution supporting the upholding of international human rights instruments to which Nepal is a party.

National elections were scheduled for 2007 but have been post-poned twice. The CPN-M has withdrawn from the Interim Government, leading to some lessening in confidence amongst the population about the sustainability of the peace process. Despite this, and some breaches of the CPA by both parties, there have been no significant outbreaks of violence attributable to either side.

Pursuant to the CPA, the CPN-M has placed its former combatants in seven cantonment sites with a view to their reintegration into civilian society or the Nepalese security forces. There are an unknown number of children in those cantonment sites, estimated to be between 3,000 and 11,000, mostly aged over 14 years.

Armed groups

The situation in the Terai (southern plains area) remains highly volatile, with a number of active armed factions including the two branches of Jantantrik Terai Mukti Morcha, the Madhesi Tigers, the Terai Cobra and the Nepal Defense Army (NDA), a fundamentalist group committed to a Hindu kingdom in Nepal. This threatens the stability of the region and, indeed, the whole country as it is the location of the only highway crossing Nepal in this region.

In addition, or linked to these groups, the Young Communist League (closely connected to the CPN-M) has played an active role in post-conflict Nepal.

In addition to calling bandas (transportation strikes) across all of the Terai and other areas, some of these groups have directly interfered with implementation of the programme. In the eastern Terai, some groups have reportedly recruited returning CAAFAG. In the western Terai, cadres of the Madhesi People’s Rights Forum have stopped sensitization programmes and threatened social workers. The risk of more inter-regional, communal and sectarian violence, like that seen in September 2007 in Kapilvastu, is high as long as the concerns of these groups are not addressed.

The YCL is also reported to have sometimes been disruptive towards the UNICEF programme and to have recruited children and young adults who have left the CPN-M or the cantonment sites.

The UNICEF Programme

The CAAFAG Return and Reintegration programme operates in 34 districts and has the following components:

- To advocate at national and international levels for the recognition of CAAFAG and child protection issues in Nepal as high priority in any peace agreement process.
• To facilitate the **release and return** of approximately children associated with the Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist (CPN-M) movement and other identified armed groups and armed forces, and prevent the recruitment of children considered at risk.

• To provide **immediate care, family tracing and reunification** services by supporting interim care facilities and by providing psychosocial training to child protection teams and community groups.

• To sensitize, inform and mobilize families and communities to provide protection to these children and support full **reintegration** through national and local community campaigns, and to promote children’s participation in all steps of programme implementation.

• To **build the capacity** of NGO partners, community groups and civil society activists in programme implementation as it applies to child protection, through training, workshops and staff support.

In addition, the programme is concerned with reconciliation and peace-building.

Consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, UNICEF and its child protection partners are concerned with all children who have been associated with the armed groups or armed forces, regardless of their current status or situation. The children with whom the UNICEF programme is concerned fall into four main categories. All were previously associated with the CPN-M and it is recognised that there may be some overlap between the categories:

a) Children currently in the cantonment sites;

b) Children who have ‘self-released’ including those who have escaped from the CPN-M at any time;

c) Children who may have been asked to leave the cantonment sites on an informal basis;

d) Vulnerable children.

UNICEF’s operational partners in the programme consist of UN entities, international organizations, INGOs and national NGOs. The GoN, while holding primary responsibility for the protection of children in Nepal, has taken a more active role towards the end of 2007, including the development of a national plan of action for reintegration and with regard to children’s education.

UNICEF’s role in the programme is mainly centred around coordination, raising and accounting for funds and providing technical support to national partners. It chairs the CAAFAG Working Group.

**Purpose of the evaluation**

The primary purpose of the evaluation is to assess the programme’s progress to date in order to find ways to make it more effective for the short and medium-term future.

**Specific objectives**

These include:
• To describe the release, return and reintegration process of children in Nepal, highlighting those areas that prove to limit access of children to services or reintegration support and those which facilitate the process;
• To evaluate the impact of the programme on the children in their transition to civilian life including a comparison between the CAAFAG and non-CAAFAG children in the communities;
• To evaluate the effectiveness of the various components of the programme;
• To evaluate the application of the major relevant international instruments, including the ‘Paris Guidelines/ Commitments’ and how they may guide the future of the programme;
• To evaluate the gender dimensions of the programme as it affects girls and boys respectively;
• Where relevant, to evaluate the social impact of the payment of stipends to children;
• To assess the respective contributions of UNICEF, the CAAFAG Working Group and the Resolution 1612 Task Force to advocacy that has affected the major decision-making for the implementation of the programme;
• To highlight the constraints faced by UNICEF and partners in implementing the programme;
• To assess the role of other partners including UNMIN, OHCHR, UNDP, WFP and UNFPA on the implementation of the programme and assess this collaboration;
• To assess the opportunities for increased or new collaboration with other organisations (international and national);
• To assess the extent to which donor investment has contributed to the achievement of the programme;

Method

A single consultant is carrying out the evaluation, with support from the UNICEF Child Protection section. The evaluation will be conducted in three stages:

a) December ’07: Desk review and inception report: This stage will consist of a literature review of relevant documentation relating to the programme and other relevant literature, the drawing up of the methodology for the evaluation, decisions regarding the appropriate locations for the second stage and the design of a questionnaire for UNICEF and partner staff members;

b) January ’08: Field work: This stage will involve interviews and observations in Nepal – at Kathmandu and field levels. Between three and five districts (to be identified) will be visited. Preliminary findings will be presented at meetings of stakeholders as appropriate at field level and in Kathmandu towards the end of the field mission;

c) February ’08: Report writing; a draft report will be submitted to UNICEF Nepal for distribution and comments as it considers appropriate. The report will be finalised and submitted to UNICEF Nepal by the 23rd February 2008
Interviews will be held with the following wherever feasible. Where appropriate, interviews will be attached to pre-arranged meetings.

- UNICEF staff members (particularly Protection and Education sections)
- Staff of partner UN entities and specialised agencies, particularly OHCHR, WFP, UNFPA, UNDP, OCHA and ILO
- UNMIN
- IOM and other international organisations
- Representatives of the GoN security forces (police and armed forces)
- Representatives of the CPN-M and YCL
- Representatives of the Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education
- National Human Rights Commission
- INGOs particularly IRC, Save the Children, Search for Common Ground, CARE, World Education and TPO
- National NGOs in the CAAFAG Working Group
- Members of the 1612 Task Force
- Representatives of the donor and diplomatic community
- Children (ex-CAAFAG and others in communities)
- Parents/carers
- Other community representatives including teachers and vocational skills trainers

In addition, local formal or informal children’s institutions may be visited as well as a selection of vocational training facilities.

Issues to be considered

As a result of the desk review, the following areas have been identified as necessary areas for inquiry, complementary to the Specific Objectives described above:

- How to move towards a common understanding of the meaning of effective reintegration across all stakeholders;
- How to effect the application of international norms and standards relating to children’s release and reintegration;
- How to effect formal demobilisation and release of children from cantonment sites, including a review of attempts already made;
- How to identify children who have already left the CPN-M but have not had the benefit of any reintegration activities;
- How to ensure that these children benefit from reintegration processes, particularly regarding education;
- An exploration of the full range of reintegration alternatives for children;
- What advocacy efforts are most successful in preventing early marriage, domestic servitude or other harmful cultural practices for ex-CAAFAG girls;

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18 This is because a plethora of care institutions have sprung up since 2006 of variable quality and protection controls.
19 Including standards on juvenile justice, the OP to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict, CEDAW and the INEE Minimum Standards on Education in Emergencies
• The impact of gender, ethnicity and caste-based discrimination (including gender-based violence against girls and boys) on programming for release and reintegration;
• Prevention of recruitment of boys and girls into the armed groups or gangs operating in the Terai;
• Perceptions / beliefs of children and their families and communities in what constitutes effective reintegration into civilian life
• What provision is necessary at community level to ensure children’s safe and effective reintegration into civilian life;
• Timing / longevity of the reintegration programme for CAAFAG and associated funding requirements;
• The relationship between efforts to reform Nepal’s security system and the reintegration of children;
• What links can be made with efforts to support the implementation of an effective juvenile justice system or other means of avoiding the repeat victimisation of children who were associated (or are suspected of being associated) with the CPN-M;
• What links can be made with on-going efforts towards transitional justice mechanisms

Sarah Maguire

December 2007
 Annex C: Compliance with the Paris Guidelines and Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups

This programme was designed while the Paris Principles were being finalised and so is in the unusual position of being one of the first to be implemented during the early life of the Paris Principles. Since February 2007 when the Paris Principles were promulgated, organisations, including the Save the Children Alliance, have produced reports and documents on how to ensure that reintegration is effective and compliant with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This Annex takes a systematic look at the UNICEF programme’s vis-a-vis the Paris Principles and draws lessons both for the Nepal programme and others, where appropriate. The Paris Principles can be found at http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/parisprinciples.html and their numbering is adopted throughout this section. This Annex does not repeat the detail of findings and recommendations discussed elsewhere in the report although it is written so that it may be used as a ‘stand alone’ document or as an accompaniment to the main report. Where the paragraphs of the Paris Principles are not relevant, repetitive or self-evident, no mention is made in this Annex.

2. Definitions

2.0 The definition of ‘child’ is consistent with Paris Principles and with the CRC as all girls and boys under 18 years. The complexity here arises where young people who were under 18 at the material date (May 2006) have since attained 18 and so are no longer children. The programme design anticipated this and so the negotiated agreement was to include all who were under 18 in May 2006. This is also consistent with Article 6 of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It does raise issues, however for young people who may believe themselves to have been discriminated against in terms of entitlement to different types of support – through the UNDP programme or the UNICEF programme and, in turn, particularly for youth who have been associated with the armed group for a longer time and really do consider themselves adult active combatants. This issue is one that taxes the international child protection community in almost all countries and is a reason why the reintegration of children who have been associated with armed forces or groups should not be delayed. Most of the youth in the cantonments will have been there for nearly two years and may be nearer 20 years old once they are finally released.

2.1. The programme’s definition of a child associated with an armed force or armed group, while consistent with the Paris Principles and with other international standard, has caused some controversy and confusion with the implementation of the programme. In Nepal, some children will have been associated with the CPN-M for a short while, engaged cultural activities or being ‘taught’ about Maoist ideologies while others will have been with the armed group for years and have taken an active part in the hostilities. Correctly, the programme has not distinguished between these children in terms of eligibility for support but has tried to tailor the support received to take account of the children’s experience.

2.8. Child reintegration: The programme has taken a “child in environment” approach to reintegration. There is a ‘reinsertion’ stage where children are reunified with their families or communities and go back to school (if they are able and willing to do so); the emphasis of the programme is on ensuring that the children engage with a civilian life-style. For this reason, the declaring of children as ineligible to join the national armed forces under the
terms of the peace agreement, even if they have turned 18 since May 2006, is consistent with the meaning of child reintegration. The programme has been innovative in trying to define successful reintegration by the development of “Child Led Indicators”. It is to be hoped that the result of this work and the associated research will be published so that future programmes may benefit.

3. Overarching Principles

**Discrimination:** The programme has been largely consistent with the overarching principles of non-discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnicity, caste or other social definitions. There remain some lessons to be learned, however.

3.2. Girls: The programme partners make every effort to identify girls, to include them in programming and to ensure that gender-based discrimination is not perpetuated during the programme and this is successful in most regards. The notable exception is in terms of the vocational training component, where traditional gender-based roles are reinforced by the training options.

3.3. Reintegration: From its inception, the programme was alert from the outset to the need to avoid stigmatising children on the basis of their recruitment into the armed group. The programme has ensured that non-CAAFAG children have been included in the package of support offered and this appears to have reduced the likelihood of either stigmatisation or resentment at the support the CAAFAG receive. The stigma faced by children is particularly acute in the case of girls and this is more to do with their association with boys and men out of the gaze of their families and across castes than to do with the ‘armed’ label associated with the CPN-M. The programme has taken this on board to an extent and many of the social workers are aware of it and try to combat it at the family level. It remains a problem, however and could have benefited from a more comprehensive and planned communication strategy with the entire community.

Of more immediate concern during the course of the evaluation, and a lesson for other programmes, is the impact of setting a ‘quota’ for the number of children who were expected to enter the programme without going through the interim care centres. This number was underestimated, largely because the programme was designed on the (reasonable) assumption that most children would be formally released from the cantonments. It was also partly because the implementing partners were, for the first time, trying to identify children who had been associated with the armed group in a way that was consistent with their understanding of the Paris Principles; the emphasis at the beginning of the programme was on registering children and it is possible that some children who were not in such need of programme support were included (although, strictly speaking, they were eligible). This resulted in confusion amongst implementing partners about how to deal with children who were identified later in the programme. Some partners stopped registering them, others registered them but put them on a waiting list for support, while others registered them but said they could not obtain support. The Paris Principles are clear that all children associated with an armed force or armed group are equally eligible for support, according to their needs.

It is suggested that the lesson for programming in other contexts, therefore, is to create contingency plans (with budgets) for mass release, for a ‘trickle’ release or for pockets of release. Donors should understand the need for flexibility in this regard.
3.4 Best Interests of the Child

The programme itself is clearly informed by a commitment to the best interests of the child. The challenge to meet this imperative has been manifested by the reluctance of the armed group to send all the minors out of the cantonments and the fact that this has not been the subject of sustained and robust advocacy by all concerned with the peace process. This means that children and youth have been languishing in the cantonments instead of going to school or taking training, isolated from their families and enmeshed in a militaristic culture and command structure.

The issue of paying stipends to minors is clearly contrary to their best interests. As was heard during the course of the evaluation, this is likely to create stigma, resentment and may even result in youth using their money to buy tickets to work abroad, without community or family support. If this was a compromise to achieve the early release of children from the cantonments, it has clearly back-fired as it has been in the CPN-M commanders' interests to keep the children ‘earning’ their stipend. In Nepal, as in some other countries, it is regrettable that the child protection agencies were not able to take the lead on these issues.

3.5 Children and Justice

The issue of prosecution for the war crime of recruiting or using children under 15 years old has been problematic in many countries. While it is unlikely that any of the CPN-M will be prosecuted under national or international law, the CPN-M leadership is aware of their vulnerability in this regard and this may have been one of the reasons for their reluctance to comply with the provisions of the peace agreement to immediately release all children under 18.

There is little information about the involvement of children as perpetrators in violations committed during the armed conflict; currently there are apparently no steps to prosecute children. Of more concern has been the involvement of children in violent protests and their treatment by national security forces, both during the conflict and during subsequent unrest. This has been the subject of advocacy by the SRSG and UNICEF, aimed both at the political groups who have used children in this way and the national security forces.

The establishment of a truth-seeking and reconciliation mechanism is still at early stages and appears to have been superseded by the imperative to obtain information and compensation for disappearances that occurred during the armed conflict. It is to be hoped that the issue of the recruitment and use of children will, eventually, be included in such mechanisms.

3.11 Children’s right to release

At the policy level, there is consensus across the UN in Nepal and the international NGO partners that there should have been no children associated with the CPN-M. UNICEF and its child protection partners had more difficulty in ensuring that this key advocacy message was disseminated across the UN. It appears that the imperative of the peace agreement took precedence over the rights of children to be immediately released from association with an armed group. Whether, in retrospect, more could have been done and done more robustly with greater political will from all concerned is a matter of history. It is clear, however, at this point that there were adhesions between the issue of the release of children
and those of wider security sector reform, in a way that contravenes both the CRC and the provisions of the Paris Principles. At best, there was some lethargy about effecting the release of all the children and, at worst, the CPN-M was able to use the minors as a negotiating tool.

3.14 Participation and respect for the views of the child

Almost all organisations working on behalf of children find this challenging. This basic principle of the CRC runs parallel with those that proscribe discrimination and stress the best interests of the child. Children who join armed groups ‘voluntarily’ or who engage in dangerous political activity associated with political groups – whether armed or not – can be said to be exercising their views and that these should be respected. The CRC also imposes obligations, however, on adults to ensure that children are protected from harm, even where that harm is apparently self-imposed.

In the current Nepal context, the main challenge is to manage the protection issues for children engaged in political activity that may put them in harm’s way or directly endanger them, while respecting their right to have a political view and to participate in political activities.

At programmatic level, the tension between participation and the best interests of the child has been manifest in the vocational training component of the programme, whether this is boys wanting to take driving lessons although they are too young to drive or girls expressing a desire only to learn tailoring while there may be other, more lucrative and less traditionally gender-stereotyped options for them.

Despite the above, programme partners have engaged in some innovative and successful work with children. Most notable are the international organisation TPO and Search for Common Ground, both of whom prioritise the participation of children and youth. Search for Common Ground’s programme, particularly, strives to ensure that children and youth are involved as dynamic actors for peace, rather than only seeking their views about adult-imposed programmes.

Operational Principles

3.15 The Paris Principles state that “planning for reintegration should... commence at the earliest possible stages”. The programme is to be applauded in that it designed the reintegration package at the same time as the plans for release and reinsertion. As stated above, however, implementing partners needed guidance and mentoring at the early stages of the programme to ensure that the programme was not overly ‘staged’; that children who had been registered could start being reintegrated while others were still being identified.

Accountability and transparency

3.16 Implementing partners received training and some mentoring in child rights and humanitarian principles and it was impressive that they had clearly integrated these into their understanding of the rationale and practice of the programme. This is an area in which continued mentoring is necessary, as well as ensuring that implementing partners have access to lessons learned from other programmes. Where there are international NGO partners, capacity should be included in the programme design (and budget) to allow this to happen.
Most implementing partners were well aware of the protection issues to do with working with children and were alert to the need for vigilance and reporting mechanisms in this regard.

**Context-Specific Programming**

Programming for the reintegration of children associated with armed groups is relatively new in South Asia. Most of the lessons have been learned in Africa, where the context is very different. Despite this, the programme did manage to address the fact that most of these children have joined 'voluntarily' rather than being abducted, that physical violence and sexual abuse were not characteristics of their association and that there was less stigma associated with being an ex-CPN-M child. The selection of national implementing partners was largely on the basis of the degree to which they were both embedded in the local community and could manage the political complexities of the local context. The networks of social workers also mean that the programme can constantly reassess the realities on the ground to ensure that the programme remains relevant and appropriate. The challenge here is to ensure that there are channels for information to come up from the social workers to the international partners, including UNICEF and that the social workers themselves, as well as the project coordinators, have adequate time and space with the international managers.

Obtaining information in Nepal is itself challenging, due to years of armed conflict where people may be reluctant to speak about sensitive issues, cultural considerations and codes about what is acceptable to say (and to whom) and, on a practical level, the terrain itself. It can take days of walking to get to a remote village although this may have been the locus of much child recruitment. The CAAFAG Working Group did conduct a situational analysis at the beginning of the programme which has been helpful in informing the programme design and implementation. The challenge now is to ensure that the information collected by programme partners translates into useful information and more than a set of numbers.

**Capacity strengthening**

This programme has invested in the staff of implementing partners. The training has often been extensive. The presence of the social workers throughout the communities should mean that – particularly with regard to the psycho-social area – this information and approach starts to permeate through those communities.

Capacity-building of national structures such as governmental and para-governmental has been more of a challenge, although there are measurable achievements in this regard such as the appointment of a ministry-level focal point and the start of a plan for reintegration of children affected by armed conflict. More will need to be done in this area, particularly once the elections have happened and senior positions are settled.

**Funding and other support**
3.23 Donors have been encouragingly forthcoming to support the programme in its early stages. It appears that this has sometimes been more to do with a moral imperative than a deep understanding of the necessity to fund child reintegration on a sustained basis. Donors express scepticism that child reintegration is a ‘deal-breaker’ vis a vis the peace process. The nature of the recruitment and use - and of the way children are leaving the cantonments - appears, here, to militate against full commitment from donors for the reintegration; donors are less persuaded by the fact that any recruitment or use of children is a violation of their rights than they would be if those children had been systematically subjected to additional violations such as mutilation or rape.

The challenge here to impress upon donors not that the entire peace process will break down if children are not reintegrated but the converse, that the peace process and hopes for sustainable will be greatly improved if children and youth are encouraged to become strong advocates and actors for peace in their own communities and in any political party they join.

As stated above, contingency planning for different scenarios of release should include flexibility with funding.

The programme would benefit from a greater use and involvement of donors in their own advocacy capacity vis a vis the UN, the GoN and even the CPN-M. The latter are seeking international legitimacy which could be a lever for advocacy for those Member States with influence.

**Coordination, collaboration and cooperation**

3.26 There is, now, good cooperation within the CAAFAG Working Group and it pulls together in terms of advocacy and provision of support for the children. In the Nepal context, the decision not to include representatives of the GoN in the Working Group is the most appropriate in the current circumstances.

There is room for better collaboration with other organisations, such as UNDP and UNFPA who are obvious partners with regard to reintegration programming generally and the reintegration of girls, respectively.

It is to be welcomed that UNICEF is investigating and making moves towards partnerships with the ILO and the World Bank. Both of these have a great deal to bring to the programme and there will be much to learn for other programmes from this collaboration.

**Confidentiality**

3.29 The evaluation found that data was well-controlled and that staff of implementing partners were well aware of the need for confidentiality. A separate evaluation is being conducted concerning data collected for the purposes of monitoring and reporting pursuant to UNSC Resolution 1612.

4. **Addressing the specific situation of girls**

4.0 Not much is known about girls’ experiences in the armed group, largely due to sensitivity about asking about it. This is not universal, however, and some girls have been able to disclose sexual violence. It appears that this was not systematic or particularly widespread in the Nepal context, fortunately. The programme tries to address the particular
situation of girls although staff members need more guidance and mentoring in this regard. The ‘cri de coeur’ with regard to girls tends to be that reintegration is more difficult for girls and there is anecdotal evidence with a few concrete examples of girls who have been married early to avoid stigma or as a means of social control over them.

5.7 Internally displaced children

Internal displacement has been a characteristic of the armed conflict in Nepal and has continued recently as a result of civil unrest and sectarian violence. Children are, inevitably part of those communities and some of these will have been associated with the CPN-M. While the programme does not apply particular considerations to CAAFAG on the basis of their internal displacement status, the nature of internal displacement in Nepal means that – with a few exceptions – CAAFAG who are also internally displaced are included in the programme. Social workers and teachers are particularly aware of children who have recently arrived in the community or who are marginalised within the community on the basis of their recent arrival from other areas.

It is of note that teachers and social workers report that some children are displaced, with or without their families, in order to avoid recruitment or re-recruitment.

6. Prevention

Now that there is a Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the CPN-M have been integrated into the transitional government and elections seem likely to go ahead as planned in April, it is unlikely that children will continue to be recruited into the armed wing of the CPN-M. The most pressing issue with regard to child recruitment now, therefore, is the ambiguity around some of the political groups and the ‘sister’ organisations of the CPN-M. Of these, the Young Communist League (YCL) is of particular concern. While many of its activities are clearly those of a legitimate political group – and while children have a right to participate in political activities according to their capacities – the concern here is that some of the activities of the YCL are more akin to those of an armed group than a youth wing of a political group. Additionally, some of the activities that the youth are reported to be engaged in are likely to put them in danger, such as extortion. During a visit to one YCL establishment during the evaluation the team was told that only those who were “prepared to die for the cause” were housed in the establishment and all the songs and poetry was about doing just this.

In addition to the YCL, in the recent unrest across the Terai, children were involved in stone-throwing and were allegedly subject to unreasonable force by the national security forces. On this occasion, UNMIN engaged in robust advocacy with all sides to protect these children.

There is a lack of consensus across the CAAFAG Working Group about the meaning and implications of the YCL and other political groups that use children and youth; the lesson for future programmes could be to adopt a child protection approach so that it matters less whether the group is an “armed group” within the meaning of international humanitarian law than whether there is a child protection concern. In this regard, the lead on this decision-making falls naturally to UNICEF, who can then bring in the resources of other bodies such as the UN Mission Child Protection Section or the OHCHR office as necessary.

Ratification and implementation of international legal standards
6.4 Nepal is a State Party to most of the major relevant international instruments for the protection of children from recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups, including the CRC and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, ILO Convention 182 and the Geneva Conventions of 1948 and their Additional Protocols of 1978. It has not, however, ratified the statute for the International Criminal Court. It was also present at the Paris conference “Free Children from War” at which states committed to the Paris Principles. Nepal is also one of the ‘pilot countries’ for the monitoring and reporting mechanism pursuant to UN SC Resolution 1612. The legal age of recruitment into Nepal’s own national armed forces is 18.

6.7 The Paris Principles exhort states to carry out information campaigns to disseminate information on relevant national and international law. In this connection, it is regrettable that no information or other media campaign was carried out to encourage children to come home or their families to accept them. The exception to this is the radio programme conducted by Search for Common Ground which has proved popular amongst child protection agencies across the country.

Monitoring and reporting

6.15 A separate evaluation exercise has been conducted on the monitoring and reporting of child rights violations. For the purposes of this report and Annex, the key issues are to ensure that there is consensus across the monitoring and reporting mechanism / Task Force regarding definitions of violations and to formulate appropriate responses to violations as they occur. For instance, while minors are being kept by the armed group contrary both to international law and the CPA, there should be consistent advocacy and other response by all concerned bodies, including UNMIN and UNICEF.

Advocacy for prevention

6.21 The use of children in armed conflict constitutes an on-going violation of their rights. Prevention, therefore, includes the prevention of an on-going violation, not only the ‘event’ of recruitment.

The CAAFAG Working Group consists of a range of international and national NGOs as well as international organisations. Each of these is able to conduct advocacy at appropriate levels to prevent children from being recruited or used by armed groups. Advocacy can be carried out at very local levels, district and regional levels as well as nationally. To date, unfortunately, there has been little indication that children have been released as a result of advocacy by UNICEF or the Working Group with the CPN-M or UNMIN. This demonstrates that in a context such as Nepal, where the peace process appeared to take precedence over child protection concerns, there is a need for an early decision – by consensus with child protection agencies – about the extent of advocacy and what compromises are acceptable.

Prevention and education
6.26 The evaluation found that CAAFAG who were in school as a result of programme support were determined to stay there. Their teachers reported them as being motivated, hard-working and with a mature approach to their studies. Children told the evaluation team of the importance of being in school as a prevention from re-recruitment.

Building local initiatives

6.27 The programme made connections with existing School Management Committees from the outset, with positive results in terms of encouraging these bodies to think in terms of the best interests of the school children. This is continuous work and needs input from the staff of implementing partners who, in turn, need support from their international colleagues. There was also some evidence of the programme making connections with grass-roots, community-based organisations to ensure that CAAFAG were being included in community-based activities.

Child Clubs run mostly in schools and there is good evidence that they make efforts to include CAAFAG. In some cases, CAAFAG have adopted leadership roles. The work done by Search for Common Ground is encouraging in that it invites child club and other youth leaders to find ways to integrate CAAFAG into their activities.

The programme is also, more recently, making connections with the para-legal committees and women’s groups that are part of or connected with UNICEF’s Decentralised Assistance to Children and Women (DACAW) programme.

Preventing the unlawful recruitment or use of girls

6.28 Girls in Nepal are recruited by armed groups for a variety of reasons, prominent amongst which is dissatisfaction with their lives at home. Girls in Nepal, particularly those from scheduled castes are subject to complex forms of discrimination in all spheres of life and there is little recourse if this discrimination takes the form of violence or harmful cultural practices such as early marriage.

The social workers demonstrated awareness about this situation (most of them were girls themselves) and the design of the Interim Care Centres took account of girls’ needs to be protected and to have particular provision so that they could talk about their particular situation. The way the situation has unfolded, however, has meant that very few girls (or boys) have gone through the Interim Care Centres. The implementing partners have tried to keep track of each child that has been registered in the programme and are particularly alert to the need to advocate with parents to keep girls in school and to prevent them being married early. On occasion, the social workers have managed to persuade parents or, even, the husband to allow the girl to continue at school despite being married.

Family unity

6.31 The primary aim of the programme is to ensure that children are back with their families in a sustainable situation. This is not always possible, where the family situation is harmful to the child or where there is no available family.

7. Release and Reintegration
Planning and preparation

Planning and preparation for reintegration took place at the design stage of the programme. As mentioned above, some implementing partners took a while longer to realise that children’s reintegration should start while others were being identified or registered, but this was dealt with at a relatively early point.

Funding was obtained on a short to medium term basis. ECHO funding is always going to be of 12 months duration, whereas other donors’ funding could be for a longer term. There is still a need to educate donors that reintegration – particularly for children - cannot necessarily be truncated to meet the funding available and that effective reintegration needs a secure funding base. This is all the more difficult in a context such as Nepal where the donors are not necessarily convinced of the need for a reintegration programme per se.

As also mentioned above, planning for reintegration needs to take the form of contingency planning; this was done for this programme although the eventual realities were not forseen and it is difficult to say that they were entirely forseeable.

Advocacy

7.8 As stated elsewhere in the report and this Annex, The need here is for a consistent message; that the recruitment and use of children by armed groups is a violation of their rights and contrary to accepted practice for organisations seeking political legitimacy. Advocacy can take many forms and it is important that there are no contradictory messages given by any member of the international community or member of the CAAFAG Working Group.

7.10 Despite some advocacy by UNICEF for access to children in the cantonments it was not possible to obtain direct and free access to these minors. This meant that information could not be passed freely to them about their entitlement to leave the armed group or the support that awaited them outside the cantonments (including education) and information could not be gathered from them in order to make the programme more relevant and appropriate to their needs. Instead, access to peoples in the cantonments was restricted to arms monitors except during the verification process when UNICEF staff were allowed in for a short time.

Armed Groups

7.11 The Paris Principles state that actors concerned with child reintegration should make contact with armed groups and outlines the principles by which this contact should be made. UNICEF and its partners have made every effort to do this, and to adhere rigorously to the principles of neutrality and impartiality. A core indication of success in this regard is setting out formal agreements and mechanisms for monitoring their implementation. Although the CPA contained clear provisions for the immediate release of all minors, it has not proved possible to obtain the commitment of the CPN-M to monitor implementation in this regard.

Peace processes and peace agreements
7.12 Linked to the above, although the CPA contains explicit provision for the release of minors, the associated negotiations did not result in specific provisions for the needs of children once released, nor the commitment of financial and other resources for their reintegration.

The release process

7.13 As stated repeatedly in the report and this Annex, a formal process was agreed upon at the early stage of planning for this programme and provision established through the programme for immediate care of released minors. The interim care centres were planned in a way that was consistent with the provision of the Paris Principles, including family reunification, particular attention to girls’ needs and consideration for the security and protection of children. It is regrettable that the way in which the minors have been released has not met the expectations of the programme and so, despite much repeated planning for mass release into interim care centres, this has hardly taken place and has resulted in a much waste of time and resources for the implementing partners and UNICEF. The evaluation concluded that this was due to no fault of UNICEF or its international or national implementing partners.

Eligibility

7.18 As stated earlier, the programme was designed consistently with the Paris Principles and other international standards to include children who were not necessarily directly involved in hostilities or engaged in strict militaristic activities.

Interviewing children

7.25 Both during the verification process, where UNICEF was directly involved and subsequently in their dealings with children in the community, interviewing by UNICEF staff and implementing partners appears to have been carried out with sensitivity, compliant with the principles of the CRC and confidentiality.

An inclusive approach to reintegration

7.30 The programme has been consistent with the Paris Principles and other international standards in that it has ensured that the whole community – largely through support to schools and to other vulnerable children in the community – has benefited from the programme. Paradoxically, there has been some criticism of the programme for this where some have taken the view that the programme is too wide and looks like a “development” or a wider child protection programme. This criticism reflects the dilemma that is often faced by those designing and managing reintegration programmes for adults or children, particularly vis a vis donors’ expectations and the tension between those engaged in political processes and those child protection agencies.

UNICEF is facing the challenge to integrate this programme with its wider child protection programming and its education programming. There could be further opportunities, such as to involve the Water and Sanitation programming. As the peace process is consolidated, particularly once the elections are over, it is to be hoped that the children in the community will continue to be included in wider child protection programming, such as the work on juvenile justice and in the development of the plan for conflict-affected children being drawn...
up with the GoN. The challenge here will be to maintain an appropriate distinction for CAAFAG without either stigmatising or favouring them above other conflict-affected children.

**Material assistance**

7.33 The Paris Principles are clear that direct cash benefits should never be given to children and it is regrettable that this has been ignored in the political negotiations with the CPN-M; children have an expectation that they will receive the same ‘stipends’ as their adult colleagues. Community members expressed reservations about children coming home with proportionately large amounts of cash, with particular regard to girls who may already have to deal with suspicion about what they did while away from their families.

Other material benefits have been managed by the programme so that children receive in-kind benefits that enable them to return to school, that schools themselves benefit from the reintegration of CAAFAG and that other, vulnerable children also receive support to their education or skills training.

**Family tracing**

7.36 This has not been necessary on the same scale as many other child reintegration programmes and, where it has been identified as necessary, appears to have gone smoothly.

**Support for families and communities to which children return or integrate**

7.37 Community sensitisation and mobilisation has formed a prominent component of the programme. The programme was designed so that, as children were identified within the community (by teachers, parents, community leaders or the programme’s social workers) members of that community would be encouraged to understand the reasons for children’s recruitment and their needs upon return. This seems to have been successful, although it appears that this has been less challenging than in some other contexts, largely because children are not regarded as perpetrators and were not forced to commit egregious acts against their own families and communities. Some parents, teachers and children expressed strong appreciation of the support they have received from social workers in helping them accept children – particularly girls – who may have come back from the armed group with a different, more assertive and independent attitude. On the other hand, as mentioned above, teachers report that many CAAFAG have an exemplary attitude to their studies and some have become role models and leaders for other children.

It was not possible to identify the impact of the radio programmes developed by Search for Common Ground although they have met with demand, particularly in areas where they have not yet been transmitted.

The support to this aspect of children’s reintegration may need to continue for some time once the ‘honeymoon’ period of children’s return is over and they settle more into their communities.

In this regard, some interviewees suggested that other family members could benefit from skills training or income generating support so that the whole family could support itself and not regard the returning child either as a burden or someone who has been favoured for going away.
Family reunification and family-based care arrangements

7.45 The need to ensure that children do not become institutionalised in programme-based interim care has been obviated by the way in which children have returned to their communities. The concern, here, is that children who have been in the cantonments for nearly two years will be institutionalised into that way of life, particularly as they have been run along command and control structures. These youth and their families are likely to need intensive support over the short and medium term.

Supporting children in finding a role in their community

7.46 This dimension links to that of vocational training and income generation, particularly for the older children and youths who will be returning from the cantonments towards the end of the peace process. It will be especially important to ensure that their skills and newly developed capacities are valued and that they are engaged in useful, productive activities, where possible outside the command and control structure of the CPN-M or the YCL, so that they can return to civilian life – the ultimate goal of any reintegration programme. In this regard, programmes that focus on building women’s leadership should include girls and young women and both girls and boys should be included in community-based income generation such as rural cooperatives.

Children with a disability and others requiring particular support

7.50 Nepal does not have a positive record of dealing with children or adults with disability. They tend to be marginalised, even within their own caste or ethnic group and this is particularly acute for girls who may be considered unmarriagable. The programme has not addressed children with disability in particular. There are opportunities, however, for including CAAFAG with disabilities in programming for mines victims, where appropriate or with other partner organisations such as Handicap International. For this, new partnerships will have to be forged.

Children who are deeply traumatised do not feature as significantly in this context as in many others where children have been more directly involved in active hostilities or have been deliberately traumatised as part of their association with an armed group. Nevertheless, there is a substantial minority who will continue to need specialised assistance. The concern here is that the level of psycho-social training given to the social workers – even where it has been intensive and prolonged – is insufficient to make them really qualified to deal with these children and there is a dearth of qualified social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists and little in the way of psycho-social referral networks or mechanisms, particularly in the rural areas.

Children who were not separated from their family or community

7.56 The nature of the armed conflict in Nepal means that this is a live issue for the programme to consider. As stated in the report, many children have been recruited and released in one way or another before the programme started. Some of these will have continued to be associated with the armed group. Other children may never have left their village or only been separated for a very short time and so their reintegration needs are quite different from their peers who have been away for months or even years. As the programme has matured, it has taken this context on board. The challenges here are to ensure that the
programme targets assistance appropriately while including all children who are eligible but not seeming to favour these children over those who may – because of the impact of the armed conflict, such as orphans – be in greater need.

Prevention of re-recruitment

7.57 As stated elsewhere, the real concern and challenge here is to prevent children who have been associated with the armed group in one way from being absorbed into activities that are inappropriate for their age and capacities. This is most particularly of concern for children and youth who have been with the armed group for the longest and, in turn, those who have spent many months in the cantonments with adult combatants. For many of these children, the only way of life they really know (and like) is that of a military command and control structure. There is nothing to stop them wanting to continue these types of activities. While this may not strictly constitute “re-recruitment” in the legal meaning of the word, it may result in increased criminality and further dislocation of these youth from their communities.

The reintegration of girls

7.68 This is mostly dealt with elsewhere in this Annex. Suffice to say, here, that the programme may offer an opportunity to advocate with communities and national structures alike on issues of gender-based discrimination and the protection of girls against harmful cultural practices, discrimination in the work-place and assumptions about girls’ and women’s capacities.

Health

7.69 The programme does not have a specific health component, although there is provision in the programme budget for dealing with urgent health needs of returning children. Again, because children did not, mostly, go through interim care centres, implementing partners were not called upon to address this issue on a residential basis.

Psycho-social aspects

7.73 It is encouraging that this formed a central part of the programme’s design and that it continues to be regarded by all programme partners as a key component. The international NGO Transcultural Psycho-social Organisation (HealthNet) (TPO) has taken a lead in this regard and has attempted to ensure that the psycho-social dimensions of the programme - including the training of social workers - has complied with the IASC guidelines.

As stated above, the concern is that social workers, even if trained by TPO or others, may be dealing with children with complex psychological problems, particularly if they have been associated with the armed group for a long time and are thrust back into their communities without reinsertion support.

TPO is grounded in the local context and so makes every effort to be culturally appropriate and sensitive, as well as being gender-sensitive and gender-aware.

Reintegration, education, vocational and skills training and livelihoods

7.77 These form significant components of the programme and vary in their success.
The educational support that the children receive is perhaps the strongest (and most straightforward) aspect of the programme. It is inclusive, benefits other children directly and indirectly while establishing returning children back into a productive and supportive environment. As stated above, the programme has also enabled or encouraged the School Management Committees to start thinking in terms of the best interests of the children of the school, with support from the implementing partners. Some of the financial support to schools has not always been used in the most productive way to support children but this has been identified and rectified wherever possible.

The vocational training component of the programme is perhaps its weakest. This is due, mostly, to a lack of capacity across UNICEF and its partners at the design and early implementation stages. The early involvement of the ILO, UNDP or NGOs with particular expertise in vocational training and income generation for ex-combatants would have made this component stronger. It is currently training a small number of children - mostly girls – and almost exclusively in gender-stereotyped roles. Future programmes would benefit from an investment in a more rigorous market analysis, including gender and risk analyses and by ensuring that all the activities were assessed for their child protection implications. The Paris Principles borrow from other international standards as well as stressing the child protection dimensions and future programmes would do well to follow this guidance.

Effective vocational training and income generating work with children needs adequate resourcing. It is also key to the reintegration of older children who may be unable or unwilling to go to school. Without appropriate support in this regard, children and youth can quickly become bored, under-employed and be exploited by those engaged in criminality. On the other hand, children and youth who are encouraged and supported to use their new or pre-existing skills for the benefit of themselves and their communities can support nascent peace processes, help to kick-start local economies and keep useful young people in the country instead of seeking employment as migrant labourers. It is not known whether donors were approached to fund this adequately and refused or whether they were not so encouraged.

Justice

Ending the culture of impunity

8.1 There are to be no sanctions against those who recruited or used the children in Nepal. On the contrary, the lack of urgency about releasing children from the armed group and, particularly, from the cantonment once verification was complete, sends a message of impunity to those responsible.

The treatment of children within justice mechanisms

8.6 Nepal has little in the way of a child justice system although UNICEF is working with the GoN to rectify this. There is no way of knowing with complete reliability, how many children are incarcerated nor whether any of these were CAAFAG. It is understood that, while children were ‘arrested’, detained and subject to ill-treatment, torture or extra-judicial executions during the time of the armed conflict, this has largely ceased although there will be some children amongst the disappeared.

Information Management
8.12 The data-collection aspect of the programme was designed to ensure confidentiality and that information is collected on a 'need-to-know' basis. Over time, the tools for collecting information have been refined so that they are less cumbersome and therefore, more likely to be completed accurately and fully.

**Truth-seeking and reconciliation mechanisms**

8.14 This is referred to in the CPA, but there has been little progress. For understandable reasons, the emphasis with regard to transitional justice has been on the disappeared. When these mechanisms do start to be designed and operational, members of the CAAFAG Working Group, including UNICEF and the OHCHR are prepared to be engaged in ensuring that children’s needs and rights are given appropriate prominence.

**Monitoring and Follow-Up**

9.0 The implementing partners, particularly through the social workers and the network of teachers, try to ensure that they follow each child who is identified in the community as CAAFAG. This is complicated by the ‘quota’ system referred to above, where some children may not receive any attention whereas others will be followed up but not supported except for psycho-social assistance. Here, also, the case load for social workers may be too heavy for them to follow up each child effectively.

**Monitoring and evaluation**

10. This evaluation was conducted largely by interviewing children, their families and communities, as well as those who are supporting them. Organisational capacities, however, prevented the involvement of children in the design phase of the evaluation or in presentation of its results.