

# **PRACTICAL GUIDE**

**To fulfil the reintegration needs  
and rights of girls formerly  
associated with armed forces  
and armed groups in  
South Sudan**

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## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, UNICEF and Child Soldiers International would like to offer their appreciation and gratitude to the girls who shared their experiences during the research and directly inspired the recommendations in this Practical Guide. We hope that it will contribute to improving their daily lives, as well as the lives of all girls affected by conflict in South Sudan.

In addition, we are grateful to all child protection actors (governmental and non-governmental, at local, national and international levels) who have contributed their time and effort to the development of this guide, including:

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Child's Destiny and Development Organization  
Community Action Organisation  
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Danish Refugee Council  
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The Seventh Day Adventist Church in South Sudan  
Grassroot Empowerment and Development Organisation  
Greater Upper Nile Organisation

Hold the Child  
Human Rights Watch  
International Committee of the Red Cross  
International Rescue Committee  
INTERSOS  
Initiative for Peace Communication Association  
Mercy Corps  
Médecins Sans Frontières  
Nile Hope  
Nonviolent Peace Force  
Oxfam  
Plan International  
Save the Children  
Terre des Hommes  
Vétérinaires Sans Frontières - Suisse  
Vétérinaires Sans Frontières - Germany  
Voice of Peace  
Women Vision South Sudan  
World Vision International  
ZOA International  
Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations  
United Nations Mission in South Sudan  
United Nations Population Fund  
United Nations Refugee Agency

## Preface

Significant progress has been made in recent years to end the phenomenon of children associated with armed forces and armed groups in South Sudan. The signing of the peace agreement in September 2018 and the Action Plans between the United Nations and the Sudan People's Liberation Army signed in 2012 and 2014, and between the United Nations and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition in 2015 are part of this progress. Through acceding to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict in September 2018, the Government of South Sudan further committed the country to ending the exploitation of children in armed conflict and to supporting children who have been exploited by armed actors in their psychosocial recovery and community reintegration.

Through the combined efforts of the Government of South Sudan and the United Nations, over 28,000 children have been released from armed forces and armed groups since 1998. However, most of these children were boys, as many girls associated with armed forces and armed groups have often missed out on demobilization and reintegration efforts.

To ably address this issue, in collaboration with the National DDR Commission (NDDRC), UNICEF and its partners developed this Practical Guide to facilitate and strengthen the reintegration of girls formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups.

We encourage all those working to prevent and respond to child recruitment to use this guide, which provides ideas for small-scale interventions that draw on existing community resources, to strengthen the capacity and resilience of the environment to which the girls return. Interventions include socio-economic strengthening, with a particular focus on agriculture and animal husbandry, formal and informal education, and emotional support. The Guide's objective is to enable families and communities to fulfil their role in supporting the psychosocial recovery of their daughters, neighbours and friends.

The needs and wishes voiced by the girls who participated in the research underpinning this Guide are no more than their fundamental rights as set out in various national and international legal instruments. UNICEF and NDDRC will continue to work together to ensure that these needs are duly taken into account in future activities regarding the demobilization and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups.



## Introduction

### Context

No one disputes the fact that, over the last 30 years, children have been widely used and recruited by armed actors across South Sudan. The practice goes back at least to the early 1980s, when North and South Sudan, then one country, started to engage in a protracted civil war.

Despite several significant releases of children from fighting forces over the years<sup>1</sup>, the number of children still associated remains in the tens of thousands<sup>2</sup> and the recruitment of children persists.

For a long time in South Sudan (and other conflicts) children associated with armed forces and armed groups were often thought to be boys, with only a sprinkling of girls. This is because people would tend to think of children associated with armed forces and armed groups as 'child soldiers': children carrying and using guns. However, girls were also associated with armed forces and groups in large numbers as domestic helpers (fetching firewood and water, cooking, carrying supplies, and so on) and as 'wives' or sexual slaves. Yet, because they were rarely thought of as 'child soldiers', they were usually not included in demobilization efforts. As a result, of the 25,298 children demobilized between 1998 and 2014<sup>3</sup> only about 1 per cent were girls. Similarly, of the 1,683 children released in Pibor county in 2015-2018, only 0.5 per cent were girls. It was not until 2018 that the wide presence of girls was publicly acknowledged, and they accounted for 35 per cent of the 745 children released in Yambio.<sup>4</sup>

Non-governmental and state actors alike agree that girls associated with armed forces and armed groups in South Sudan have largely been invisible. Little is known about their number, their experiences 'in the bush', and their needs upon release. With the exception of Yambio in 2018, they have often missed out on demobilization and reintegration programmes, and such programmes, where they exist, have largely been designed for boys. This realization was the starting point of this guide and the research that underpins it.

<sup>1</sup> Over 28,000 children were released between 1998 and 2018 according to an estimate by the National DDR Commission.

<sup>2</sup> As of February 2019 UNICEF estimates that 19,000 children are associated with armed forces and groups.

<sup>3</sup> National DDR Commission.

<sup>4</sup> 2018 releases in Yambio: February, 248 boys/100 girls; April, 137 boys/111 girls; August, 98 boys/51 girls.

## How the Practical Guide was developed

In this context of growing awareness of the presence of girls in armed forces and groups, UNICEF decided to take steps to fill the knowledge gap. In 2018, at the request of UNICEF, Child Soldiers International, which had recently conducted a similar study in the Democratic Republic of Congo, carried out research on the situation and reintegration needs of girls formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups in South Sudan. The research tried to establish how they were faring after having left the armed forces/groups and were back at home; and their perception of what was helpful to them during their reintegration in their communities.

In August and September 2018, a two-person research team travelled to Juba, Pibor, Bentiu<sup>5</sup> and Yambio, for a period of four weeks. The team met with 48 girls formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups who had either escaped or been unofficially let go; over 150 adults, including members of the government, the United Nations, NGOs, and communities; 23 formerly associated boys; 12 conflict-affected girls who had not been associated; and four families of associated girls (see Annex 2 for table of research participants).

We asked these girls about what had happened to them, before, during and after their association, to learn if and how reintegration assistance could be improved. However, it should be noted that none of the girls we met had benefited from any release and reintegration assistance directly upon their return. This was either because there had not yet been any formal release in their area at the time, or because they had not been identified as 'associated' during the release exercise (see Common Assumptions on page 14). Therefore, some of the advice included in this Guide covers some of the basic principles of release and reintegration (often called DDR).

The objective of the research was to inform and improve reintegration programmes for girls returning from armed forces and armed groups with a Practical Guide based on the past and present experiences of formerly associated girls, and on their suggestions of what would improve their lives.

5 While the researchers went to Bentiu, Unity State, they were only able to meet formerly associated girls at the Protection of Civilian site, and not in their village or natural family environments. In addition, despite meeting several child protection NGOs, members of women's groups, and formerly associated boys who provided valuable information, the researchers were only able to meet four formerly associated girls. Given the scarcity of information about the reintegration context, the Guide cannot pretend to offer recommendations that are all applicable to Unity State.

In December 2018, the research findings were presented at a two-day workshop in Juba. The workshop was attended by 27 DDR representatives from United Nations agencies and NGOs. At that meeting, participants were apprised of and discussed the findings of the research. The group worked together to develop recommendations on specific aspects of reintegration programming for girls, based on the research findings, the voices of the girls, their own experiences, and those of similar reintegration responses in other countries. A draft Practical Guide was developed based on these rich workshop discussions and circulated for comments among participants before being finalized.

## Objective of the Practical Guide

**The guide is a collection of practical ideas to improve DDR assistance to girls in South Sudan.**

It is mostly based on experiences and suggestions from the girls we interviewed, and from South Sudan-based DDR experts who participated in the research and the Juba workshop. It is presented as a toolbox to help DDR, child protection and sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) actors, including case workers and social workers, to respond to the specific needs of girls formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups in South Sudan, in a way that also fulfils their rights. It should be noted at the outset that:

► **The Guide does not aim to be exhaustive.**

It proposes ideas based on the girls' suggestions, and compiles tried-and-tested interventions shared by South Sudan-based DDR experts. Anyone using this Guide is encouraged to share any relevant and useful experience that would enrich it, with UNICEF South Sudan.

► **The Guide does not aim to be authoritative.**

It should be used to complement current guidelines for child DDR, in particular, the February 2007 Principles and Guidelines for Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (known as the Paris Principles) from February 2007, and not to replace them. Its added value is that it proposes practical ideas to implement broader DDR standards and principles.

- ▶ **The Guide does not aim to propose a definitive approach to girls' DDR in South Sudan.** As the researchers were only able to visit four areas of South Sudan, users of the Guide should bear this in mind, using it as inspiration while remembering that ethnic, geographic and age-related differences will necessitate adapting the Guide to the specificity of each context and each child.
- ▶ **The recommendations of the Guide do not necessarily exclude boys.** Many of the approaches proposed in the Guide also apply to boys formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups.
- ▶ **Some of the approaches proposed in the Guide are not new and have been used by NGOs in the past.** However, they are not systematically known or used all over South Sudan, as child demobilization has yet to be rolled out in several parts of the country.
- ▶ **Specific attention is given to family and community acceptance of formerly associated girls.** The research found that an overwhelming majority of girls from Pibor and Yambio had received warm welcomes from their families and communities. However, information gathered from several informants suggests that the situation may be different in various locations in Unity State and elsewhere in South Sudan. The Guide therefore offers a separate section with suggestions for more difficult reintegration contexts. These recommendations are based on prior research conducted by Child Soldiers International in settings of severe stigmatisation, rejection and isolation of girls formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups (Section G).

## How to use the Practical Guide

The Practical Guide begins by describing the current situation of girls formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups in South Sudan (Section A); and then moves on to practical advice on how existing support can be strengthened (Section B), and suggestions on how to provide access to education (Section C), and livelihood and vocational training (Section D) when appropriate.

It also offers guidance on how to identify girls who have escaped or been let go and who are not known to DDR actors (Section E); how to respond to sexual violence (Section F); and how to promote community acceptance in places where girls might be rejected (Section G).

Each section provides 'How to' guidance by listing practical actions numbered from B1 to G6 and including answers to questions such as Why? By whom? For whom? And when?

Blue boxes in the Guide offer specific suggestions to DDR, child protection and GBV actors, including case workers, who will implement the actions.

Actions B1 to G6 have also been linked to relevant sections of the Paris Principles, which is the primary guiding framework on reintegration of formerly associated children. These can be found in the endnotes of the guide.

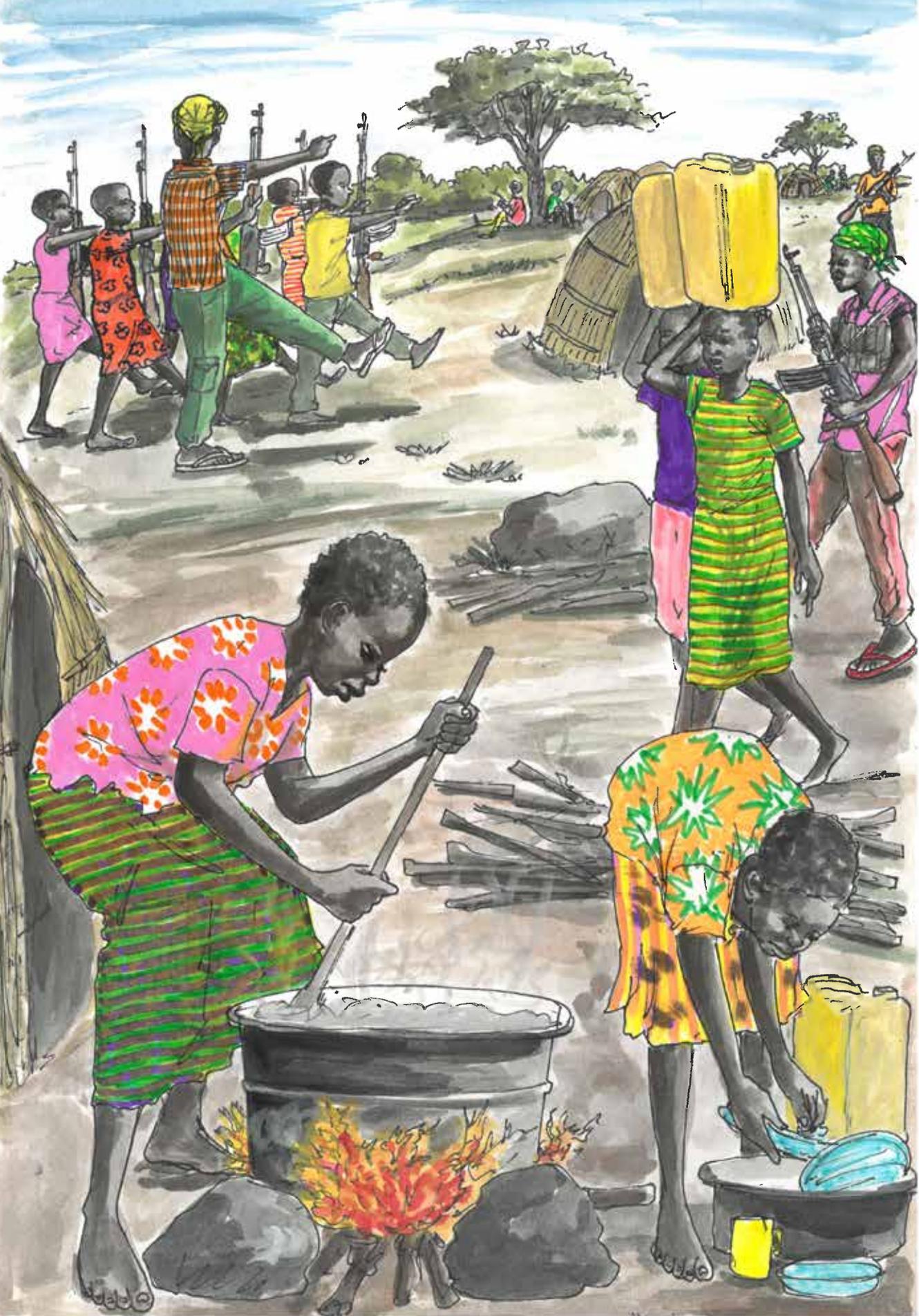
## Common assumptions about girls associated with armed forces and armed groups in South Sudan

Let us first look at a few common assumptions about girls' association with armed forces and armed groups:

COMMON ASSUMPTIONS	THE REALITY
<p><b>Very few girls are associated with armed forces or armed groups</b></p> <p><i>"Mainly boys are associated with Cobra<sup>6</sup>, with a few community girls helping mothers in the camps."</i></p> <p><i>"Girls with the Yau Yau? No, we don't know of any."</i></p> <p><i>"Girls with the armed group? Yes, I heard of two. Otherwise, I'm not aware of any."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes, some women went with their husbands."</i></p>	<p><b>Children themselves told us about the large number of girls associated with armed forces/groups</b></p> <p><i>"There were many other girls there, more than 30."</i></p> <p><i>"They said 'we want to select some small girls'. We were scared, they took us from our mothers. There were many girls."</i></p> <p><i>"We walked for two days into the bush. When we got there, I found many other young girls, about 50."</i></p> <p><i>"There were still so many girls there when I escaped, more than 20. I don't know what has happened to them."</i></p> <p><i>"There were many girls with us. Wherever we went, if we saw girls, we captured them."</i></p>

6 Cobra Faction – Formerly South Sudanese armed group (South Sudan Democratic Army Cobra Faction).

COMMON ASSUMPTIONS	THE REALITY
<p><b>Girls go to the bush with relatives, so they are safe there</b></p> <p><i>"Girls joined to help. Some became wives. If their brothers go, they also go to carry things and help. Sometimes whole families joined."</i></p> <p><i>"We saw girls joining, even in our place. They joined with their brothers. Sometimes the whole family went together with the cattle."</i></p>	<p><b>Some girls, particularly in Pibor county, were with relatives, but 82 per cent of those we met had been abducted</b></p> <p><i>"Some old women were grateful for the help that the Yau Yau men gave them, so they offered young girls to them."</i></p> <p><i>"We would fetch water and cook, and at night they were raping us."</i></p> <p><i>"The soldiers would beat us and force us to sleep with them. I became pregnant there."</i></p> <p><i>"Some girls were married, some had more than one man. Even me, I had several men." [she was forced to]</i></p> <p><i>"I saw lots of killings, day and night. They can kill you if you're stubborn. Two of my friends were killed."</i></p>
<p><b>Girls help with domestic chores and they don't have guns</b></p> <p><i>"Girls in armed group and forces? Yes, many. They did chores for the armed groups, cooking, water and so on, and many were also wives."</i></p> <p><i>"Fortunately, there are no active girls, but there are many girls living with soldiers."</i></p> <p><i>"The girls did not join to fight, they joined to help, cook, clean, or to become a wife."</i></p>	<p><b>50 per cent of the girls about whom we have information were given guns and trained to use them</b></p> <p><i>"They taught us to use a gun. One day, they brought a tall man and told us to kill him."</i></p> <p><i>"Everyone was trained to use a gun; we were all given one. One day, I was forced to kill a girl. The worst things while I was with the armed group was when I was forced to kill."</i></p> <p><i>"I went with armed boys and men to people's houses. They tied them up, and I had to take food and other things. We would also shoot people on the road if they had nothing to give."</i></p> <p><i>"I was taught how to march and how to shoot a gun. I had no choice and prayed they would release me so that I could go back to school."</i></p>



**Now let's look at the definition of children associated with armed forces and armed groups:**

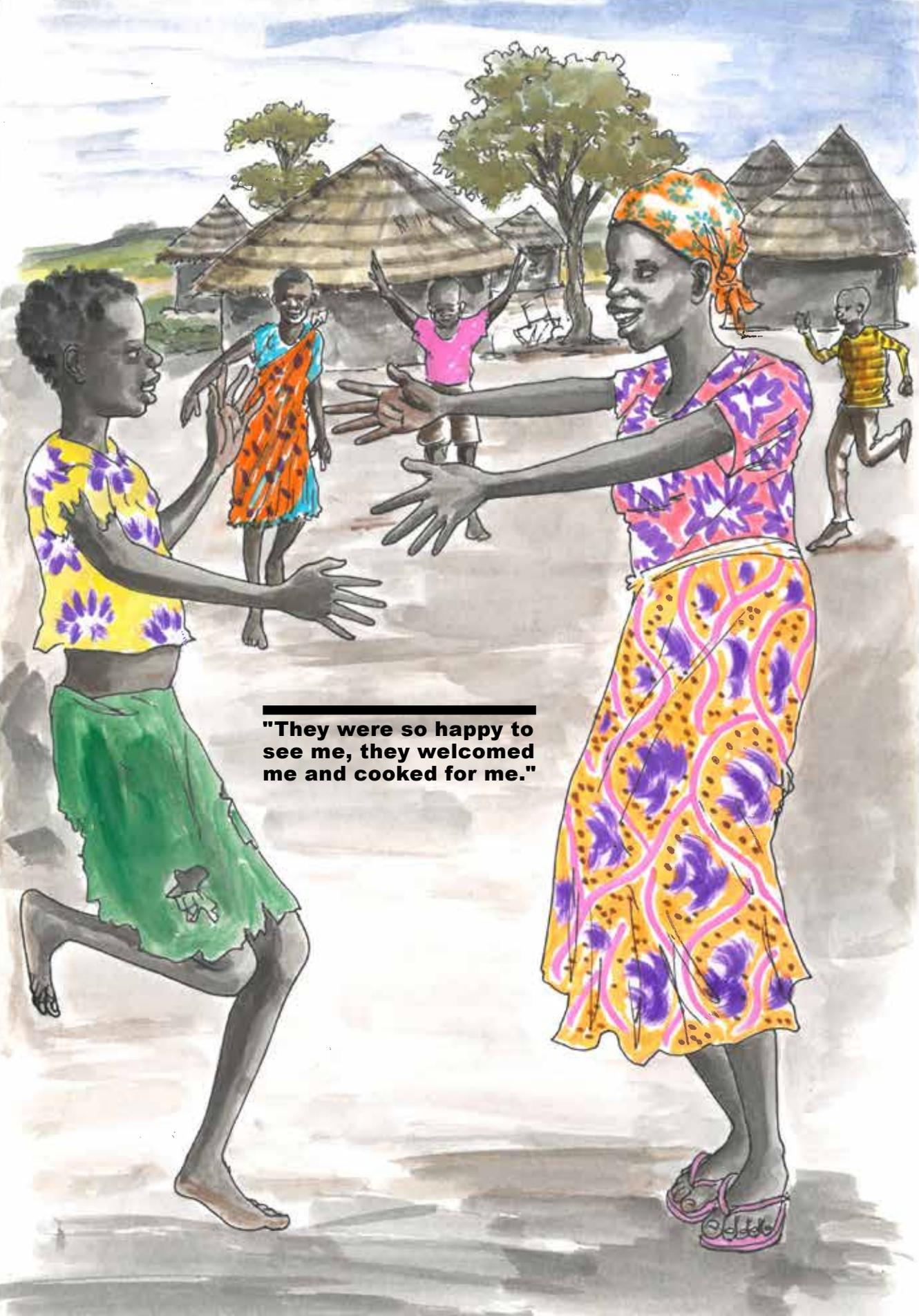
According to the South Sudan Child Act of 2008<sup>7</sup>, the 2014 Action Plan between the United Nations and the SPLA<sup>8</sup> and the Paris Principles:<sup>9</sup>

**A child associated with armed forces and armed groups is 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.**

<sup>7</sup> South Sudan Child Act, 2008: <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/83470/92194/F822057232/SDN83470.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/gov-of-south-sudan-recommits-to-action-plan-to-end-recruitment-and-use-of-children/>

<sup>9</sup> The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed forces or Armed Groups, 2007: <https://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/ParisPrinciples310107English.pdf>



**"They were so happy to see me, they welcomed me and cooked for me."**

# A.

## **Recognising healing processes that already exist within communities**

**Using the words of the girls themselves, this section identifies healing and supporting mechanisms already available in communities, and stresses the importance of promoting and supporting them.**

### **i. Coming home: family and community acceptance**

Families and communities in Pibor and Yambio<sup>10</sup> gave a warm and supportive welcome to girls who escaped or were let go and returned home. Understanding, acceptance and support by one's family and community are the first and most critical factor on the road to successful reintegration for any formerly associated child, and the foundation upon that their psychosocial recovery will rely on. Let's listen to the girls:

*"My uncle was so happy to see me; he did not know if I was alive. He took me to see my grandmother and then my mother. I was two months pregnant, but he said it did not matter, because I was alive and back. He took me to see the community leader, and then to the hospital for a medical check-up."*

*"People in the community only asked me 'where have you been these last two months?' but they were all nice to me."*

*"I went straight to my grandmother; she couldn't believe I was still alive and started crying. She gave me water to bathe and cooked me food. Before I used to think about it, but now it has started to disappear."*

<sup>10</sup> This applies to two areas of South Sudan: Pibor county and Yambio. At this stage, we have no reliable information on how associated girls will be received and accepted by their families and their communities in other areas of South Sudan.

*"When I escaped and got home, my father was overjoyed, as he thought I was not alive anymore. My relatives were informed, and everyone was happy. I did not have any problem with the community who were good to me. I had a medical check-up and they gave me medicine because many men used me. I don't know the father of my first child, but after I gave birth, a man took me as his wife."*

## **ii. The healing power of supportive listening**

Most of the girls told us how much emotional relief came from simply talking to their mothers, friends, and sometimes neighbours. Family and community members who give their time, interest and empathy are the most immediate and efficient sources of comfort for returning girls.

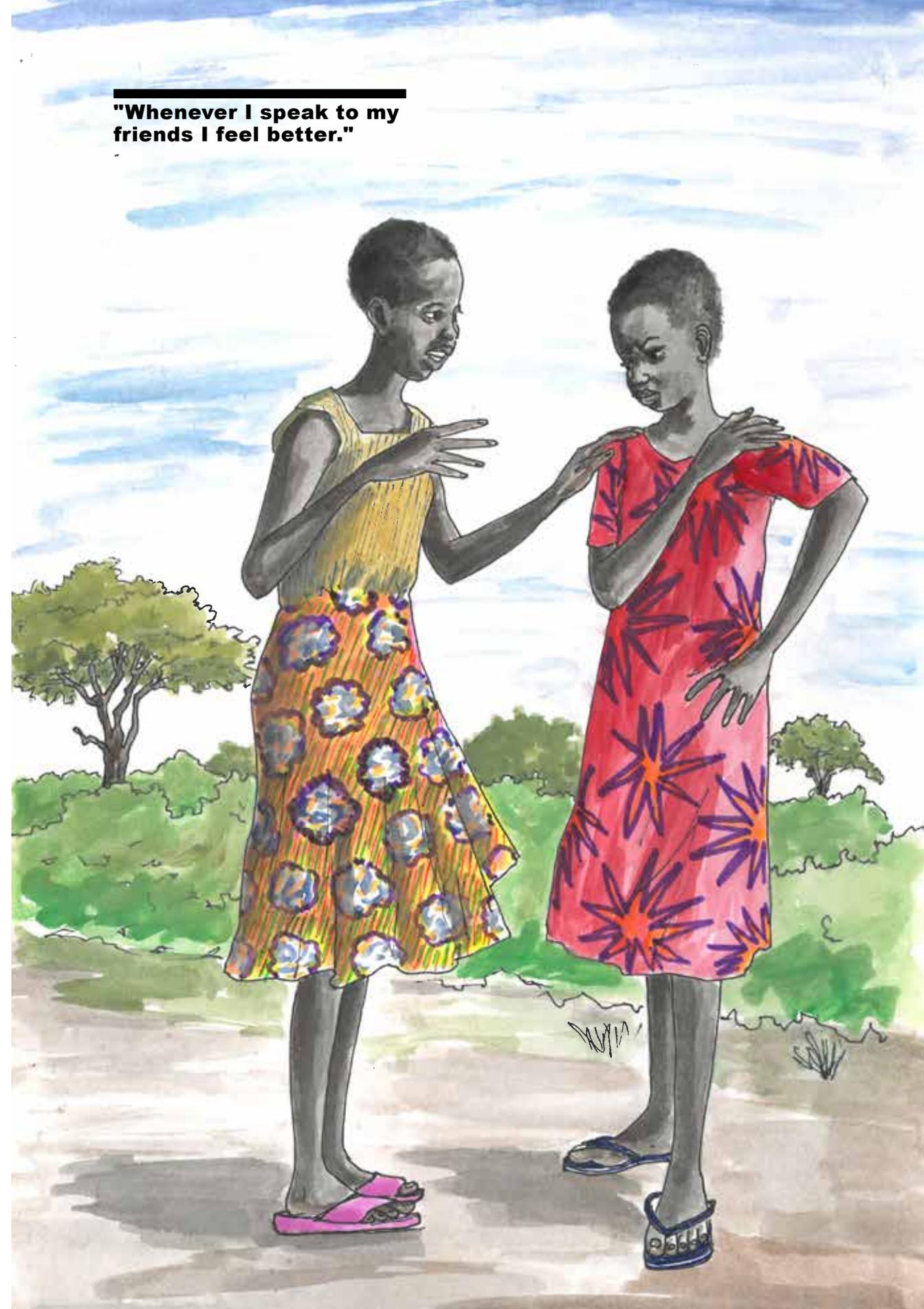
*"I sometimes think about my father, when he was killed: I see him when he was alive. When I feel bad, I talk to my friends and to my mother. My mother says, 'don't think so much, I'm here for you' and it helps me."*

*"When I feel bad I talk to my neighbour, the one whom I talk to instead of my mother [who was killed]. She tells me, 'never go to the bush', and talking to her helps me very much. I now advise my friends not to go to the bush."*

*"I keep remembering what happened, it flashes back in my mind when I quarrel with my family, it bothers me a lot. I pray and go to my friends. Whenever I speak to my friends I feel better. Sometimes I also talk to my mother; she advises me to forget about the past and tells me that she'll pray for me. I then feel better, and it's enough. I don't want to go and reveal my feelings to other people I don't trust."*

*"I never told my mother what happened in the bush because I didn't want to make her cry again. I feel better now, but if I see a gun or a soldier, I remember everything. I speak to my friends and we advise each other, we tell each other to be nice in the community."*

**"Whenever I speak to my friends I feel better."**



### iii. The importance of religion in the healing process

Most of the girls also mentioned how helpful it had been, and continued to be, to go to church to pray, sing and dance during weekly practice and on the holy day of their church. The girls found great comfort in practicing their religion and being involved in various activities with their congregation.

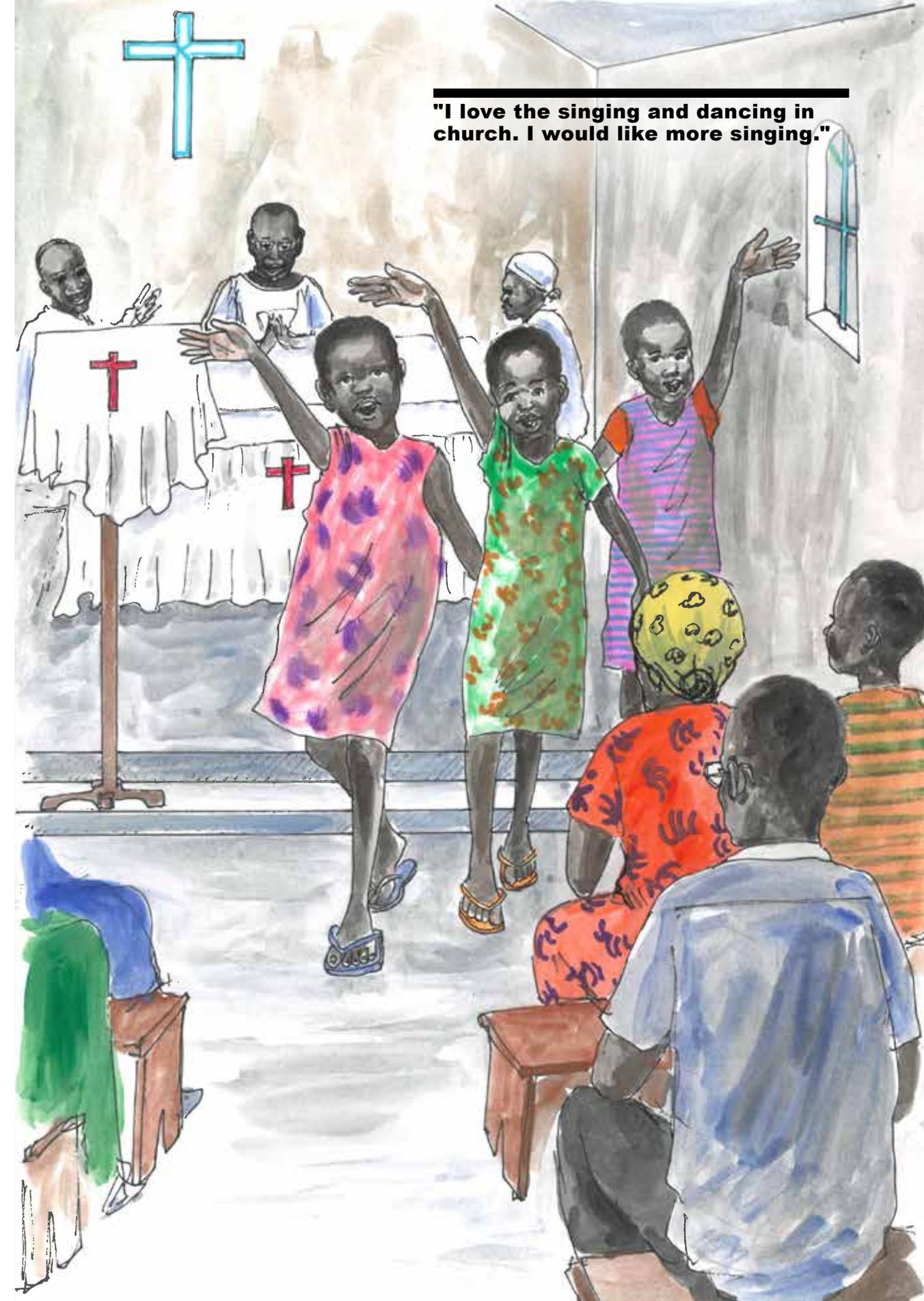
*"I'm in a youth group at church where I sing and dance on Sundays [this is the first time the girl smiled], and I also have practice twice a week."*

*"The best times in my life are when I'm praying, and I'm very happy when I'm with my friends, telling stories to each other, and when I'm at school."*

*"I like going to church and meeting people there, the prayers, the singing... We talk about preaching and God. It's good."*

Some girls also indicated that either immediately or soon after their return, their family took them to church, sometimes with other community members, so that the priest or pastor could recite special prayers to give thanks for their return and welcome them back.

*"My father said, 'welcome back' and said a prayer to give thanks to God. My grandmother took me to church so that everyone could pray for me so that I could forget about the bush. It helped."*



**"I love the singing and dancing in church. I would like more singing."**

### **Perspective from a pastor in Yambio<sup>11</sup>**

"The relatives of girls who have come out ask us to come to them and pray for them. They invite you to their houses, with neighbours and family, to give thanks for the child who was lost but is now found. Sometimes they offer you tea."

"Sometimes they bring girls to the church and we pray for them there, bless them and forgive them. If the girl comes with a baby, the relatives will come and discuss – perhaps an aunt will take the baby so that the girl can go to school. Sometimes they will slaughter a chicken and eat together."

#### **iv. Healing through every-day social interactions**

In addition to faith-related activities the girls we met also mentioned other activities which provided them with a sense of joy, accomplishment and the chance of finding their place again in their communities. These activities included:

- Farming with their families;
- Being part of youth groups;
- Spending time with their friends, telling each other stories and playing;
- Taking care of their babies;
- Helping their mothers generally; and above all:
- Going to school, for the fortunate ones who were enrolled (see Section C).

Families and communities are first responders. They are best placed to take care of children returning from armed forces and armed groups, and to promote their recovery. DDR and child protection actors must focus their work on supporting them in this role.

<sup>11</sup> We learned from this pastor that dozens of families had come to see him with their daughters, and that he sometimes held prayers of thanks and forgiveness for groups of girls, many of them not known to the DDR actors (See Section E).

**Families and communities are first responders. They are best placed to take care of children returning from armed forces and armed groups, and to promote their recovery. DDR and child protection actors must focus their work on supporting them in this role.**

**“Psychosocial recovery” is the process through which someone who has been emotionally distressed can heal through positive socialising activities.**



# B.

## **Supporting communities to respond to the psychosocial needs of girls**

**Before setting out practical guidance on how to support families and communities to care for their girls, let's remember the processes behind psychosocial recovery.**

### **i. What is psychosocial recovery?**

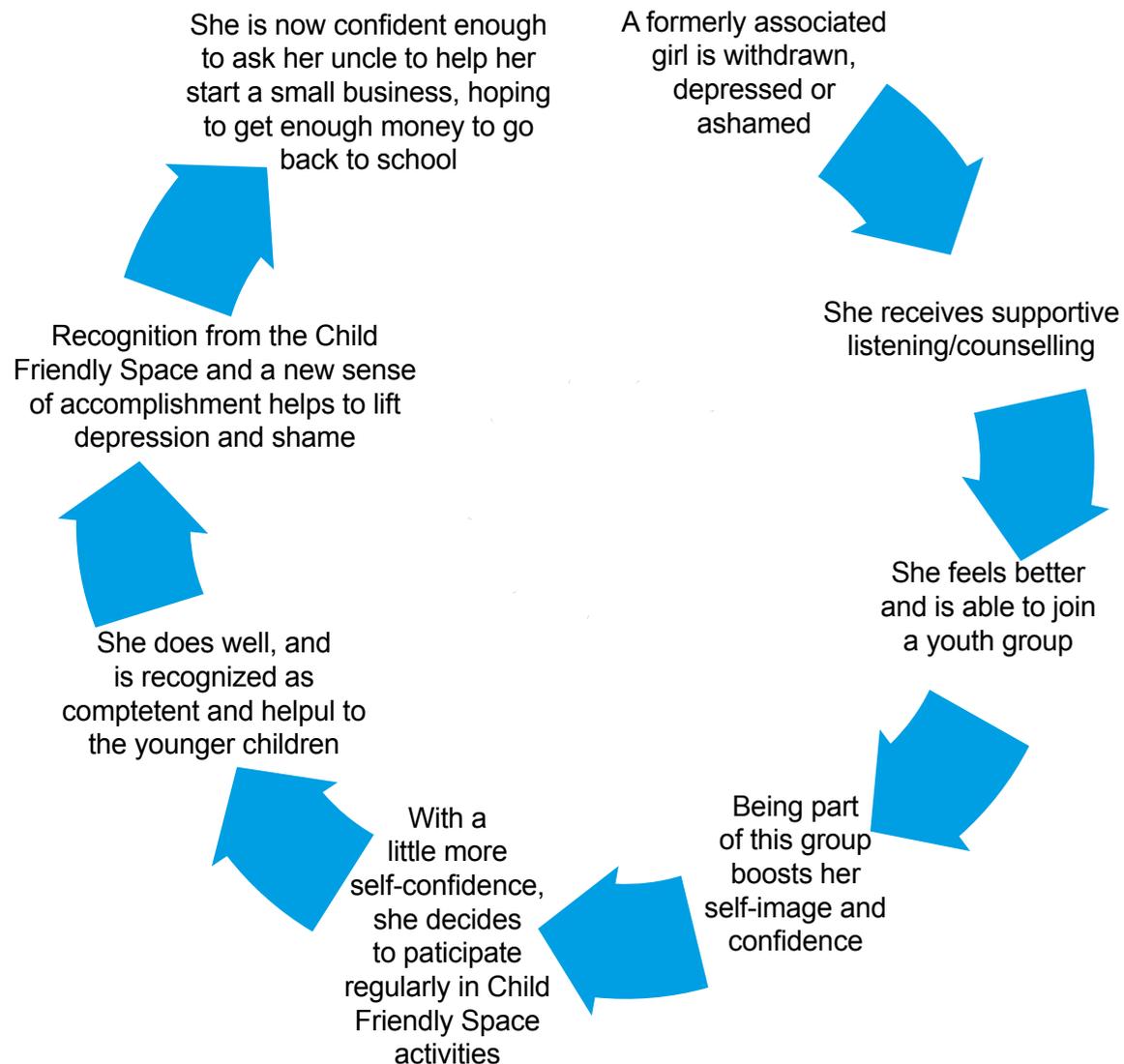
'Psychosocial' is a complicated word which reflects a very simple reality: **the fact that our emotional and social lives are interrelated and interdependent.** This means that there is a constant and dynamic relationship between the two, each influencing the other.

For example, participating regularly in positive community activities such as singing and dancing, joining a youth group, farming with your family or going to school, will have a direct, beneficial impact on your emotional wellbeing.

And similarly, confiding in someone who listens and cares, and receiving advice, comfort and encouragement will, in most cases, enable those who are withdrawn, ashamed and insecure, to join in positive community activities.

'Psychosocial recovery' is the process through which someone who has been emotionally distressed can heal through positive socializing activities.

The circle below shows how participating in positive socializing activities can promote emotional wellbeing and thereby foster psychosocial recovery:



## ii. Challenges to psychosocial recovery

Although we know that families and communities have the capacity to heal the psychological wounds of their girls, we should remember that:

- ▶ **Healing takes time.** Most of the girls we met had been out of the armed force/group and back home for months or even years, and although their families had been supportive, they told us how difficult it had been for them at the beginning, and how their emotional suffering only diminished over time.
- ▶ **Current social, economic or emotional difficulties can undermine reintegration efforts.** Some girls still showed signs of sadness, anger, frustration or even hopelessness for reasons that may be related to unresolved past experiences while in the armed force or armed group. However, in line with research conducted in other countries and what the girls themselves told us, these feelings were more often reactions to stressful current circumstances, and/or lack of access to development and reintegration opportunities.
- ▶ **The possible factors impeding psychosocial recovery are numerous and varied.** They include, but are not limited to:
  - A neglectful or exploitative family environment, (which occurs most often in the case of orphaned girls who are, or feel, discriminated against);
  - Extreme poverty;
  - Overwhelming family responsibilities (caring for sick or elderly parents or for siblings, for example) preventing the girl from interacting with friends and participating in normal community activities that promote reintegration;
  - Inability to access education, which also brought a feeling of sorrow and a sense of 'missing out' on life (see Section C on education).

- ▶ **Families and communities are not always supportive.** The communities we visited were overwhelmingly accepting and supportive of the formerly associated girls and their babies, but this may not be the case everywhere in South Sudan (see Section G on rejection).
- ▶ **Communities need help to be able to help.** Communities have been materially and emotionally devastated by years of war and deserve and require external support and resources to be able to continue to support their girls.

### iii. How can we help the helpers?

When setting up any reintegration programme, the first task is to identify existing community structures and human capacity through which most assistance will be provided. It is key to the success of the response that families and communities continue to feel responsible for the reintegration and support of their girls. We must make sure that they have a voice and take a lead role in the reintegration process, so that we do not unintentionally disempower them. This approach will also ensure a more sustainable response.

## **B1: Meet community members to seek their views and understand the girls' circumstances<sup>i</sup>**

---

### **WHY?**

**This enables us to identify strengths and gaps in community support to girls,** and to find interested community members to support reintegration.

### **BY WHOM?**

**Anyone willing and able to support girls' reintegration.** Most often these meetings should be conducted by DDR and child protection actors, case workers or social workers.

### **WITH WHOM?**

**Influential community members and formerly associated girls.**

**It is key to the success of the response that families and communities continue to feel responsible for the reintegration and support of their girls. We must make sure that they have a voice and take a lead role in the reintegration process, so that we do not unintentionally disempower them.**

## HOW?

- ▶ **Organize focus group discussions with influential community members**, such as village chiefs, teachers, religious leaders, leaders of youth groups and women's associations, members of Community Child Protection Committees (CCPC's) if they exist, and so on. The objective is to understand how they perceive formerly associated girls and what they think girls may need to recover and reintegrate, and to let this guide the DDR response.

### **Examples of useful information to gather to identify community members to support reintegration:**

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*Find out how much they know about formerly associated girls, and whether they think there are any differences between them and girls who have not been associated. If they do, ask for examples.*

*If some have a formerly associated girl in their family, ask them to tell the group about any issues the family encountered and how the family and community have supported, or are still supporting, the girl's re-entry into the community. Discuss what they think has already been done, is being done or would be helpful to do, to promote full psychosocial recovery of the girls.*

*Ask teachers if they have noticed any issues with formerly associated girls that should be addressed. Ask religious leaders if they know girls who have returned from the bush, how they think they are doing, and whether they could benefit from additional support. Ask if families have come to see them to ask for special thanksgiving and forgiveness prayers for their daughters.*

*Remind them of how strong the girls are to have survived a terrifying and painful life with armed men, and that the community has a duty to help their girls overcome their emotional distress.*

- ▶ **Meet girls both individually and in focus groups**,<sup>12</sup> taking care to include girls in diverse circumstances, for example: in school and out of school; girls who conceived babies in the bush; girls with parents and orphaned girls; girls who are making and/or selling goods; girls who are helping their families to farm; and younger as well as older girls. This will ensure that the design of the response is based on the reality of the girls' perception of their present circumstances, needs and hopes.

### **Examples of questions to ask girls to help guide the response:**

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*Start by asking the girl if she wants to talk about the things that are good in her life now, and the activities she's involved in. Encourage her to list the positive things. For example, what it's like to be able to go back to the farming plot with her family, if this is the case, or back to school. Depending on the responses, find out whether something was difficult at the beginning, and what, and who helped her.*

*You can ask about her family's and neighbours' attitude when she returned home, and their attitude towards her now. If family members or neighbours were helpful, ask her in what ways? If there were problems, what were they? Are these problems persisting or not? Ask how she thinks the problem(s) could be solved. Try to have a warm and friendly discussion and let her, and the other girls', answers guide the response.*

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**Formerly associated girls themselves are our best guide** to understanding key challenges and everyday changes that can make a difference for their psychosocial recovery and successful reintegration. **Let's take the time to truly listen to them.**

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- ▶ **Talk to families of formerly associated girls to learn** about how the girls are doing and what additional support they may need to help their girls.

<sup>12</sup> When meeting girls, make sure you are not putting them at risk (of stigma, retaliation or other abuse). To the extent possible, have female staff conduct these meetings. Make sure the girls know why they are being interviewed: that the information they share will be used to help understand and develop support if needed for girls and communities affected by child recruitment. Explain that what they say will never be used alongside their names, so no one apart from the organization will know who said what.

Some families may raise the fact that they think the child is withdrawn or that she no longer wants to help with farming, which may cause tensions in the family. The information gathered will help decide whether the family would benefit from being part of a women's group, or a parenting support group, or whether family mediation is needed. In case of destitute families without a working adult in the household, the family could be referred for livelihood training and support. A common source of anxiety for some girls is having sick or elderly caregivers unable to provide for the family.

### **Examples of information to gather from families, usually mothers:**

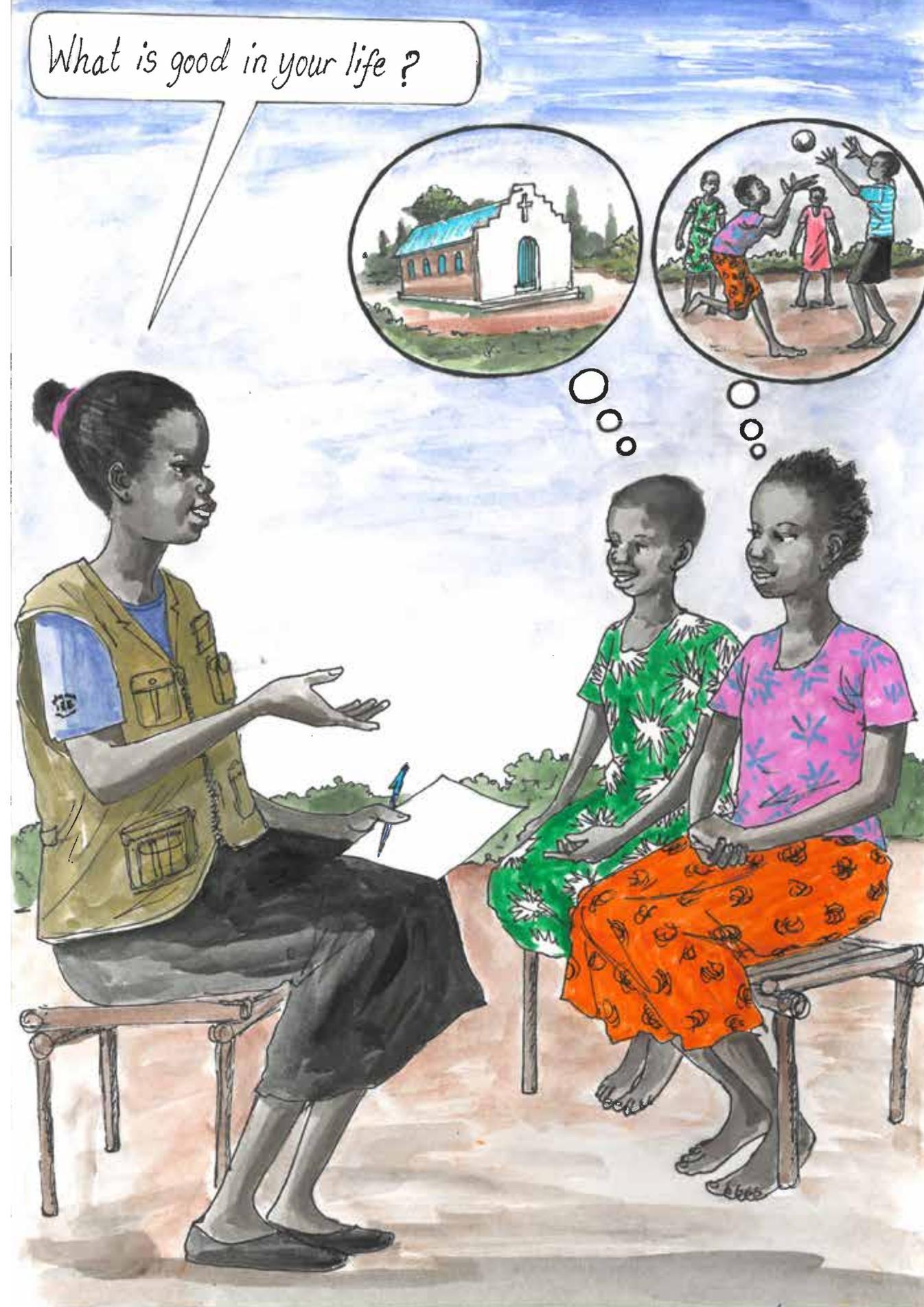
*The meeting will be different depending on whether the girl has already been home for some time or if she has just come back from the armed force/group. Be discreet when asking questions until you see to what extent the mother is willing to talk about her daughter.*

*Start with questions about herself and her family before you begin asking specific questions about her daughter and her association.*

*Tell the mother that you can imagine how hard it has been for her that her daughter was away. Ask how her daughter was when she returned home and whether there were any problems at the beginning. Ask whether neighbours were supportive, what the local chief said, and what the situation is now. Ask about the child's current activities (Farming? School? Selling prepared food? Singing and dance practice at church?) and what she thinks of these.*

*Find out if she thinks her daughter is well now and, if not, whether she knows why, and what she thinks can be done.*

**These are only some ideas about the kind of information that could be gathered from the community, girls and their families. Users of this Guide must adapt these suggestions to each case by adding or removing questions as appropriate.**



## **B2: Increase opportunities for 'supportive listening'<sup>ii</sup>**

### **WHY?**

**Supportive listening is an immediate and efficient way to foster psychosocial healing.**

Girls who did not have a family member or a friend to confide in told us that they wished they had someone to talk to. DDR, child protection and GBV actors often have trained case workers or social workers who can provide excellent emotional support in the form of 'supportive listening' visits. The girls who received such visits told us they had been very helpful.

### **WHO?**

**Anyone trusted by the girl and willing and able to conduct regular listening visits.**

Case workers and social workers are best qualified to conduct 'supportive listening' visits. However, their capacity will soon be overstretched by the thousands of girls returning from armed groups (see Section E on girls who leave armed forces and armed groups independantly). Luckily, many community members are already providing this type of emotional support, and many more could, if they had a little guidance. Having 'listeners' within the girls' communities will also facilitate the logistics of home visits, a critically important issue as the caseload increases. Listeners could be women active in the church, formerly associated women who have successfully reintegrated in the community, or teachers. The most important qualities in a good listener are: patience, kindness, ability to be non-judgmental and respect for confidentiality.

### **FOR HOW LONG?**

**Supportive listening visits must be made regularly for at least six months,** or until the girl feels that it's no longer needed. This will allow trust to develop between the listener and the girl. This trust is an important element of psychosocial recovery after traumatic experiences.

### **HOW?**

**Identify and train community volunteers who show interest and have the right qualities.**

► **DDR, child protection and GBV actors, case workers and social workers could start by identifying volunteer 'supportive listeners'** in the community. In doing this, they should follow the girls' wishes: if she has expressed a wish to talk to someone, they should ask if there is an adult who has been kind to her, whom she trusts and whom she would like to talk to on a regular basis. Although not all girls are able to identify such a person, many do, and they often choose a woman. Some girls may not want to talk to someone from their own community because of feelings of shame or fear. In such cases, work with the girl to try to identify someone from outside her community to offer supportive listening.

► **Train community volunteer 'supportive listeners'.**

The initial training could be done in a week, but volunteers must also receive regular supervision and support, as well as shorter refresher training on a regular basis, perhaps every 2-3 months. The key element of supportive listening is to make the girl feel that she is important and that the listener cares for her. It aims to strengthen the girl's resilience by helping her focus on the positive aspects of her life, and giving her good advice. The training should include, but should not be limited to, learning how to talk and listen to formerly associated girls (see table that follows).

► **After the initial training and when the listening visits start,** volunteers should themselves receive regular visits, so their work is recognized, and they feel supported. The attention to how a volunteer is doing is in itself emotional support, and along with recognition of their work, is extremely helpful to volunteers, especially in situations where there is little or no pay for doing such work.

## Training for "supportive listeners"

DO	DON'T
Accept the girl no matter what has happened to her.	Don't pass any judgment on the girl or her past and current actions.
Show interest in the girl and her life and listen to what she says with patience.	Never force the girl to talk or to give details about a particular event or feeling. Let her lead the conversation.
Keep everything confidential, unless she asks you to make a request on her behalf (for example: talking to her family about organizing a church prayer for her).	Never share what the girl told you with other people, even if you think it's in her interest. It will break the trust between you. Only share information if she has asked you to share it, and if you think it is safe.
Validate the girl's feelings – even if they may seem out of proportion. They are real to her. Simply acknowledge them for what they are.	Never take sides (or appear to take sides). If a girl is frustrated about a family issue or a sense of injustice, validate her feelings and discuss what she could do to improve the situation. If she is not able or ready to do this, ask if she would like someone to talk to her family. If she does, listeners may refer the case to an NGO, who can dispatch a case worker for family mediation.
Encourage the girl to think about the positive things that already exist in her life and make her feel good.	Don't let the girl dwell on past experiences or sad and negative things in her life for too long. She may feel worse after your visit.

DO	DON'T
<p>Depending on what is bothering the girl, it's often reassuring to her to normalize the situation. Let her know that she is not alone, that many girls have gone through the same, and that the pain will diminish over time.</p> <p>If there is a practical problem that needs to be addressed first, the listener should try to address it and refer the girl to services, including an NGO that can help (for example, lack of food at home).</p>	Don't make the girl feel that because others are also suffering and have got better, she is wrong to feel the way she does. Do not deny her feelings, which are very real. What you normalize for her are only her circumstances.
Offer simple advice to help the girl move forward in life. For example: joining a youth group, spending time with friends, participating in Child-Friendly Space activities, or studying well in school.	Never make promises that are impossible or difficult to keep.
Make referrals. If a girl continues to appear emotionally distressed (for example by not joining in any community activity, acting withdrawn, talking very little, appearing constantly anxious without saying why, or saying she feels hopeless and even wants to go back to the bush) she should immediately be referred to an NGO or case worker because she will need additional counselling or other support. Among other possible reasons, there may be unresolved issues linked to sexual and gender-based violence, or a continuing sense of guilt (see Section B3 on guilt and Section F on sexual violence).	Don't assume all children are traumatized and in need of a mental health specialist. Remember that the symptoms listed to the left are normal reactions to distressing experiences that most girls (and boys) will feel in the immediate aftermath of leaving an armed force/group. With time and support from the family and the community, most children will recover.
<p><b>This table is not a complete training course and only suggests some points on learning how to talk and listen to the girls. Users of this Guide will have to adapt this list according to the specific context in which they are working.</b></p>	

### **B3: Relieve the guilt: engage religious leaders in reintegration<sup>iii</sup>**

#### **WHY?**

**Guilt hinders psychosocial recovery and community reintegration.** Some girls are still haunted by the acts of violence that they were forced to perpetrate on others when in the armed force/group. Many told us this is what they hated the most, even more than what was done to them. This guilt stops them from healing and should be addressed.

*“I felt so bad when thinking that we were eating stolen food, it made me feel sad. To get our food, people got beaten and killed. I felt bad all the time.”*

#### **WHO?**

**Religious leaders are best placed to free girls from the torment of their guilt.** They have the God-given authority to relieve that ethical burden. One pastor said he had given absolution and conducted special prayers for dozens of girls whose parents had brought them to him:

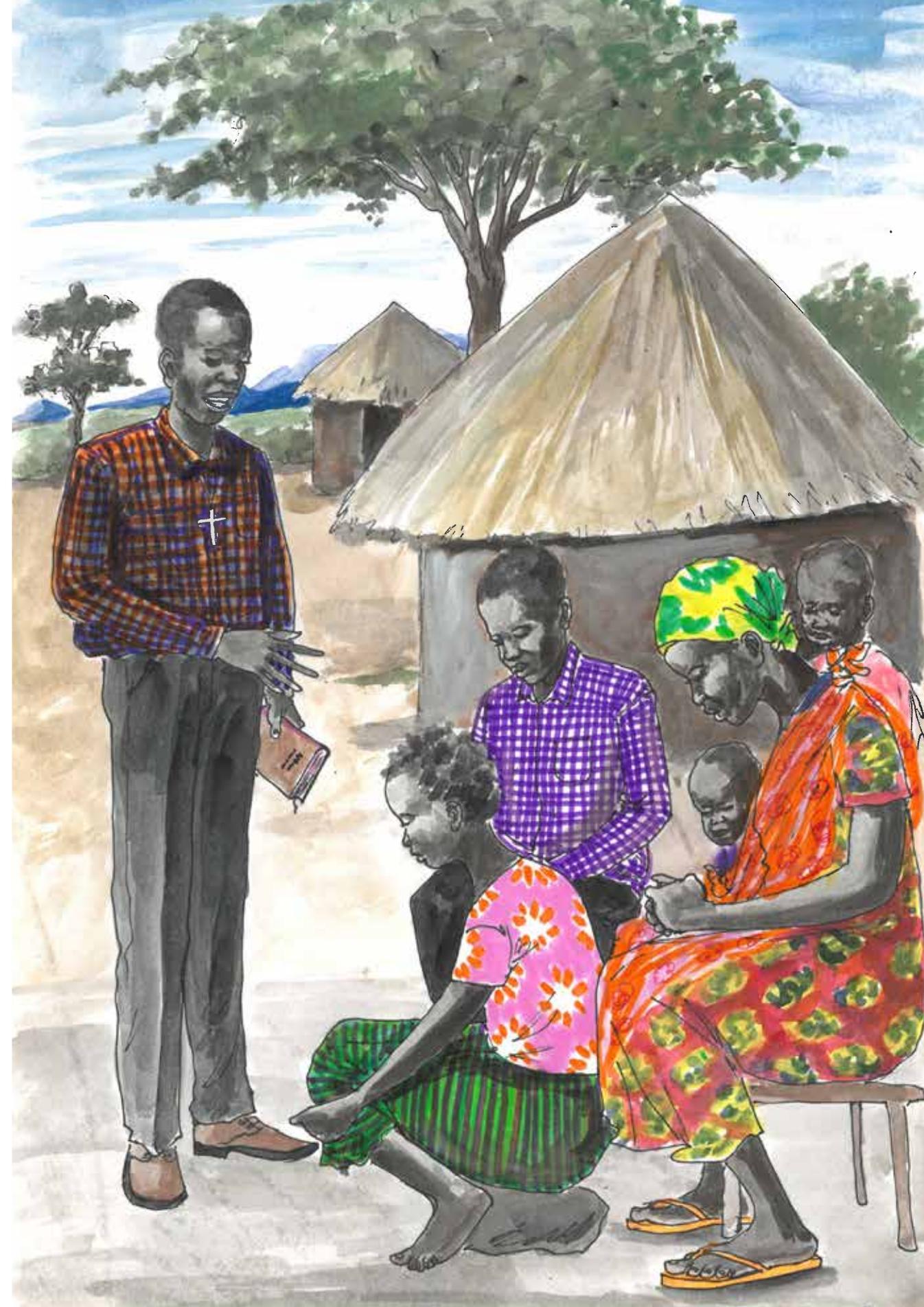
*“I explain that we are all sinners and that God is ready to forgive us all, then I give absolution. Some want to confess publicly but it can also be done individually and quietly – for yourself.”*

However, not all religious leaders are aware of this problem, and of how they can help address it themselves.

#### **HOW?**

**Engage and connect religious leaders and affected families,** so that they become aware of the solution and take action.

- ▶ Meet religious leaders in the different churches and mosques and discuss the fact that some girls are still tormented by a sense of guilt for having sinned when associated with an armed force/group. Find out whether they have already conducted special prayers and ceremonies to ask for God’s forgiveness, and blessing, and to give thanks for the safe return of these children.



- ▶ Find out if some families have already come to them asking for such prayers and if they are willing and ready to receive them if they do. Find out if there is anything special these families should do or bring.
- ▶ Discuss how such prayers could be extended to more girls who are suffering from guilt, without having to reveal publicly what they have done. For example, they could make announcements during Sunday (or Saturday) services saying that any child who has been with an armed force/group or who has been forced to do bad things can come and see the priest/pastor/imam for special prayers and to receive God's absolution.
- ▶ Ask families whose daughters seem emotionally distressed whether they have sought special prayers from their church/mosque. If they have not, and such ceremonies are an option, encourage them to contact their place of worship and explain how helpful this has been for other girls and families. In cases where a small gift to the church/mosque is expected which the family can't afford, facilitate this gift if possible, so that the ceremony may be performed.

## **B4: Support designated structures on girls' reintegration at community level**

### **WHY?**

**Designated community members must be equipped with practical knowledge and understanding of the situation of formerly associated girls;** their suffering, the reasons behind it, and the range of activities that could help them heal and overcome the negative effects of having been associated with an armed force or an armed group.

### **WHEN?**

**Once interested community members have been identified and consulted.** After meeting influential community members (see Section B1), try to engage and inspire them to form a Community Child Protection Committee (CCPC), or create a Girls' Reintegration Team in an existing CCPC as appropriate.

## **What are Community Child Protection Committees?**

These committees are composed of influential community members and other adults who have agreed to take on the responsibility to promote the protection of children in their community. Their role is to monitor the wellbeing of the children, identify problems, try to help families find a response, and refer cases to relevant services when needed. In places where CCPC members have received training and continue to receive orientation, support and recognition for their work, they have proven very useful. They are helpful to child-focused NGOs working with communities as they have intimate knowledge of issues regarding children and can more easily provide regular follow-up as they live within the community.

### **HOW?**

**Community Child Protection Committees should be created and trained on girls' reintegration. Existing CCPCs should create Girls' Reintegration Teams.** They will be the ones willing and able to focus on girls and build the capacity of community members on this matter.

- ▶ **If there is no CCPC** in the community:
  - Facilitate the creation of such a committee<sup>13</sup>.
  - Rapidly help identify a team of mostly women among the members who will focus on girls and receive additional training on the issues of reintegration of girls.
- ▶ **If there already is a CCPC** in the community:
  - Find out what the members know about formerly associated girls in their community and what is already being done to support their reintegration.
  - Discuss some of the specific reintegration needs of girls and propose a follow-up meeting to discuss the issues in more depth.

13 To learn how to set up a CCPC, see for example: Working with Community-Based Child Protection Committees and Networks Handbook for facilitators: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/working-community-based-child-protection-committees-and-networks-handbook-facilitators>

- Propose the creation of a small team within the CCPC, a 'Girls' Reintegration Team', mostly comprising women, including caregivers of formerly associated girls and at least one formerly associated woman who has successfully reintegrated, who will focus on girls, and participate in specialized training on beneficial interventions that support girls' psychosocial recovery and reintegration.

### **Training and orientation of the girls' team within the CCPC:**

- ▶ Start by asking participants to facilitate training on topics they are familiar with (a woman from church can explain the role of the church in the reintegration of girls or a mother of a formerly associated girl can offer examples of what she did to help her daughter when she returned home and was emotionally distressed, or when her behaviour was difficult).
- ▶ Participants will bring their own issues for discussion at the training and orientation. However, some examples that should be covered are listed under the training topics below.
- ▶ After the initial training, the Girls' Team members should themselves receive regular visits, so their work is recognized, and they feel supported. Receiving recognition for their work is motivating and especially important for volunteers who are not paid but who may still carry a heavy amount of work. Giving a small stipend is not recommended, as budgets may not be able to accommodate this over time. Another reason is that it is hoped that CCPCs will continue to support all vulnerable children well beyond the reintegration programme phase, after DDR actors have left the area. However, they will need:
  - *Some material support such as registry books and pens, phone credit, and some equipment to make visits in the rainy season (boots and raincoats). This is not about paying them but about providing the bare minimum so that they can do their volunteer work.*
  - *Regular mentoring visits by trained case or social workers to discuss difficult cases and to try and find a solution together, including referrals when needed.*

### **Topics that the training should cover but not be limited to:**

- ▶ **A rapid review of children's rights**, especially as they relate to the reintegration process.<sup>14</sup>
- ▶ **The meaning of the word 'psychosocial'** (see page 27).
  - *Encourage participants to give concrete examples of how specific activities will bring about a positive emotional and behavioural change in the girls, and vice versa (see circle diagram on page 28).*
- ▶ **The girls' need to be fully accepted by their families and communities**, and the fact that the level of acceptance will affect the girls' emotional status and behaviour. If needed, add training on what to do if families or communities discriminate against the girls (see Section G).
- ▶ **The healing effect when girls have someone to talk to**, who listens in a supportive manner, and the reasons why:
  - *Ask if anyone is interested in becoming a volunteer 'supportive listener'. If yes, refer them to an NGO case worker or social worker, or an already-trained volunteer.*
  - *If a good relationship has already been established between a Team member and a girl, and the girl willingly confides in the member, encourage regular visits to the girl. The member could receive training in 'supportive listening (see Section B2).*
- ▶ **Discussion of the sense of guilt some girls carry** and how beneficial receiving God's forgiveness through special prayers or ceremonies can be to wash away the actions committed while associated (see Section B3):
  - *If a girl seems distressed and you sense that it may be related to a feeling of guilt, ask what she would think about receiving special prayers at her place of worship 'because of her experiences in the bush'.*

<sup>14</sup> In the initial training, it would be too time-consuming to present and discuss all the rights of children. This should be a separate training that can come later.

Do not bring up the possible 'bad things' she might have been forced to do unless she tells you first. Simply stress that such prayers have helped many girls who have been 'in the bush'.

- If the girl is interested, ask how she would like to do this: will she ask the priest/pastor/Imam herself? Will she discuss it with her caregivers or would she like you to discuss this with them? (they are often the ones who would contact the religious institution).

► **What behaviour to expect from girls immediately and in the medium term after they have left an armed force/group,** such as being withdrawn or perhaps not listening to the parents. The reasons behind these behaviours, and how to help parents understand and cope with it:

- Explain that it is not the girl's fault (the armed force/group is the guilty party) and that the way to deal with potentially difficult behaviour is to be patient, to organize prayers and encourage activities she enjoys, and to make sure she has someone to talk to.
- Tell them that the difficult behaviour will disappear over time, once the girl engages in normal family and community activities.

► **Ask participants to list existing services and activities girls can be involved in,** and that would be helpful to their reintegration (Refer to the meaning of 'psychosocial recovery' on page 27).

► **Ask participants to discuss how they can help the girls to access these activities and services if they are not already involved:**

- Someone may need to convince the girl's parents (or her future husband if she's engaged) to allow her to join.
- It may take a visit to the youth group leader to facilitate a girl's membership.
- Helping girls to join women's associations may be another positive action a Girls' Team member could take.



## **B5: Ensure that all formerly associated girls participate in beneficial community activities<sup>iv</sup>**

### **WHY?**

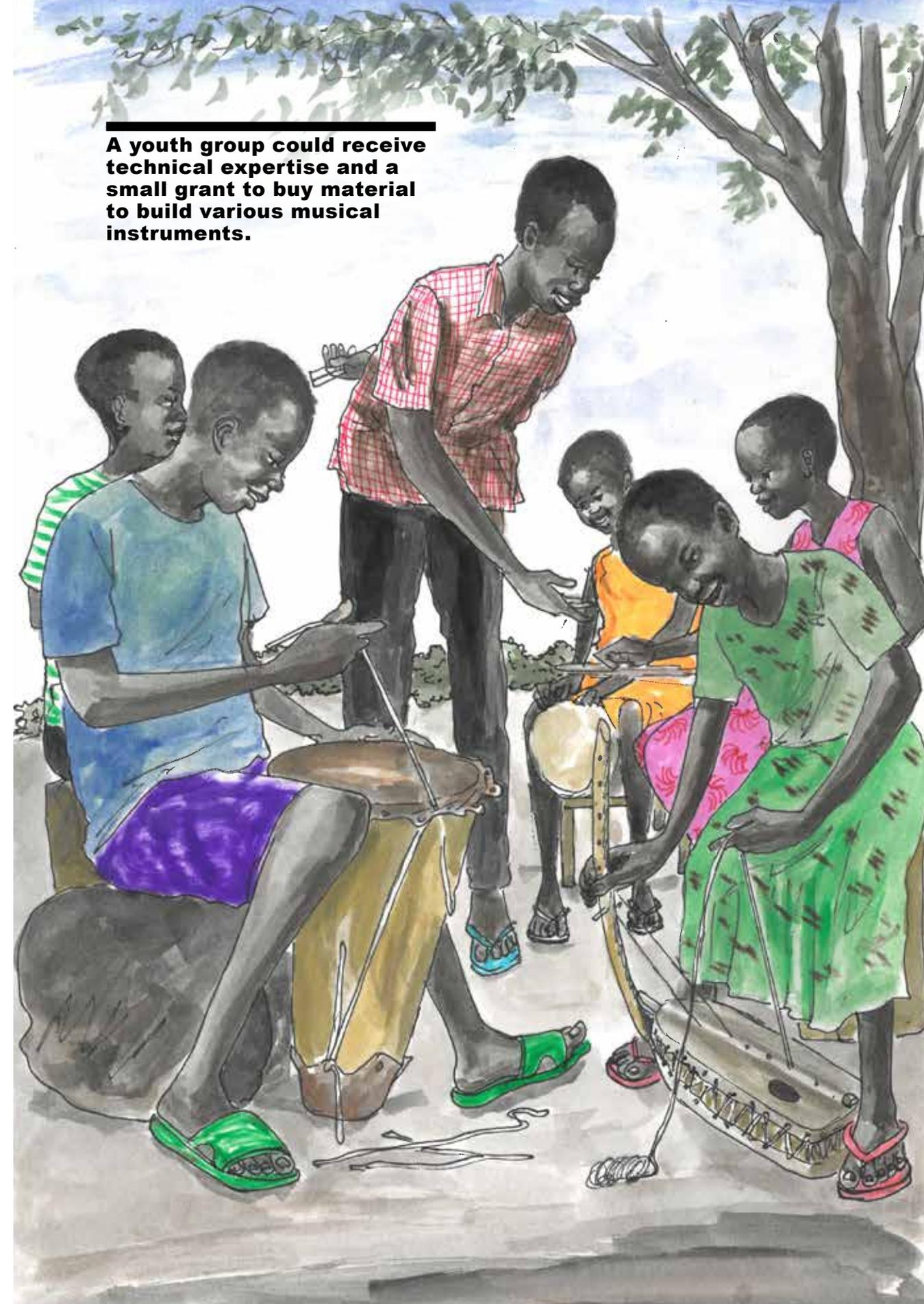
**Participating in community life is crucial for girls' emotional wellbeing.** Beneficial community activities that help girls find their place in the community again will also help their psychosocial recovery.

### **HOW?**

#### **Identify and build the capacity of existing activities and structures in the community.**

- ▶ Together with key community members (for example the CCPC or Girls' Reams), list and assess existing resources for children and adolescents in the community. This could be youth groups, faith-based activities, Child- (or Women- and Girls-) Friendly Spaces, women's associations such as saving and loans or farming and fish raising associations.
- ▶ Make sure that all NGO case workers, CCPCs, girls' teams, and volunteer 'supportive listeners' are aware of the importance of formerly associated girls and other vulnerable girls participating in beneficial community activities, so that they can refer girls who are not participating.
- ▶ Discuss with the families (and future husbands if girls are engaged) of girls who are not allowed to participate (girls may be overburdened with domestic chores), and sensitize them to the psychosocial benefits of these activities, and otherwise try to resolve this issue with the family. If changing their minds or finding a solution proves difficult, ask the village chief, or another highly respected community member, to talk to the caregivers.

**A youth group could receive technical expertise and a small grant to buy material to build various musical instruments.**



- ▶ If the assessment reveals that these existing community resources could be strengthened with some technical assistance and a small grant, help community members improve the scope and quality of their activities. For example:

- *A youth group could receive technical expertise and a small grant to buy material to build various musical instruments.*
- *A women's association could be supported by an agriculturalist teaching improved farming techniques. With a small grant they could buy<sup>15</sup> tools, seeds, or perhaps a grinding mill.*

**! Building the capacity of community groups will enable them to invite more girls to join.**

- The additional benefit of this modest material and technical support is that DDR and child protection actors will be able to refer both formerly associated and other vulnerable girls to these groups so that they can become members and join in their activities.

<sup>15</sup> In some areas, markets are not functional, and these materials will need to be provided directly.

## **B6: Support community-owned friendly spaces<sup>v</sup>**

### **WHY?**

**To complement other beneficial community activities.** Any safe place where girls (and boys) can meet and play with other children will help their psychosocial recovery.

### **HOW?**

**Re-orient existing spaces or promote the creation of new ones where there are none.**

Where Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) or Women and Girls Friendly Spaces (WGFS) already exist, try to re-orient them towards a greater ownership by community members, including by securing a greater involvement of formerly associated and other vulnerable girls. Where they do not exist, consider the following:<sup>16</sup>

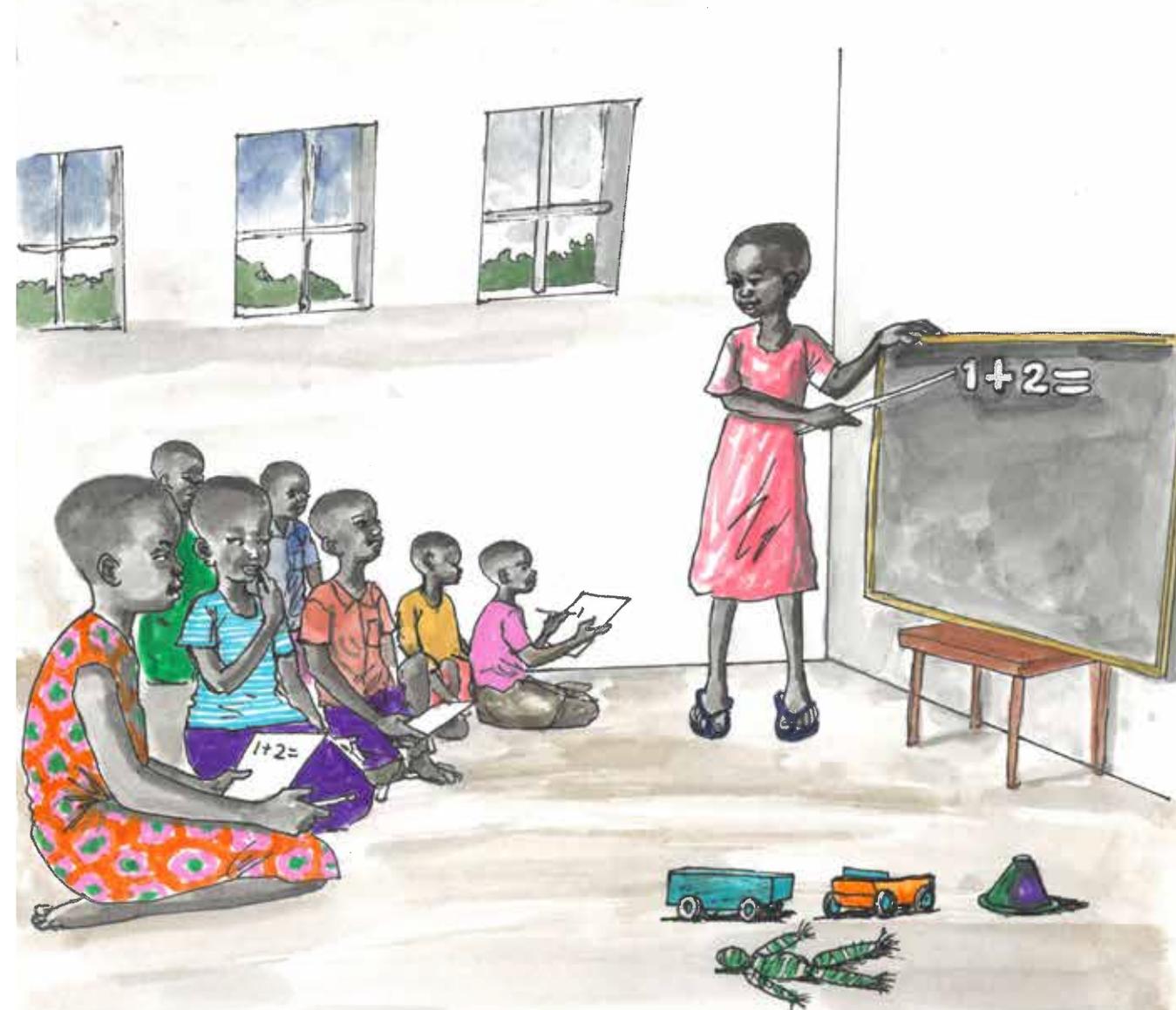
- ▶ Discuss the idea of a CFS (or a WGFS) with adult community members, formerly associated and other vulnerable girls and boys. Involve the children in choosing the location and the facilitators. The children will know which men and women from the community are naturally friendly, kind and helpful to children. Their choice will be validated by the adult community members involved.
- ▶ Organize a training of the facilitators, and an on-the-job mentoring system to improve the quality of CFS/WGFS activities. Also, explain the facilitator's role to the community to manage their expectations.
- ▶ To the extent that they have time, ask some older formerly associated girls and boys to be facilitators alongside the adults.
- ▶ Involve children in planning the activities that will be conducted in the CFS/WGFS.

<sup>16</sup> See A Practical Guide for Developing Child Friendly Spaces, UNICEF: [https://www.unicef.org/protection/A\\_Practical\\_Guide\\_to\\_Developing\\_Child\\_Friendly\\_Spaces\\_-\\_UNICEF\\_\(2\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/A_Practical_Guide_to_Developing_Child_Friendly_Spaces_-_UNICEF_(2).pdf) for more information

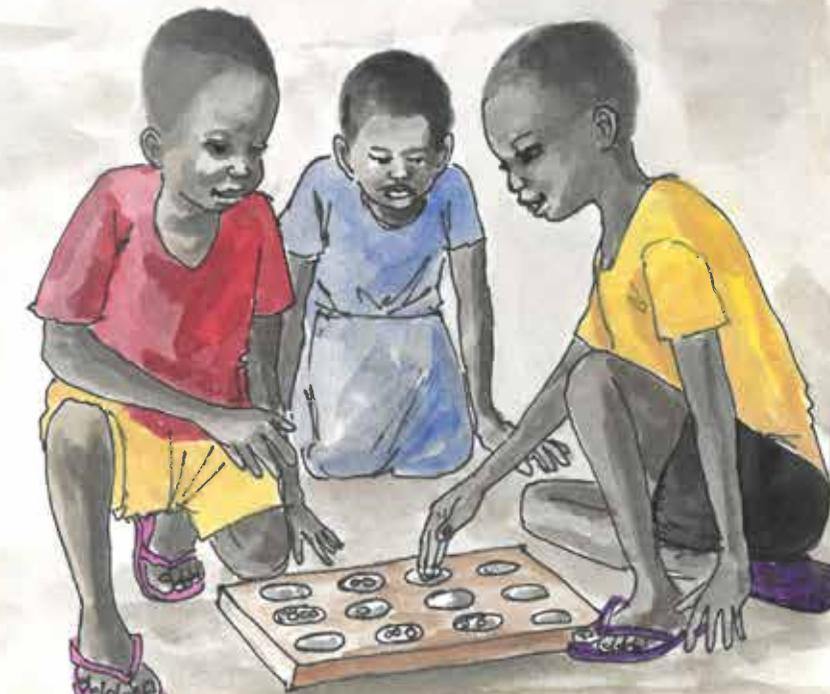
- ▶ Occasionally, invite caregivers to host activities – example storytelling, singing and dancing – but also to meet other caregivers.

**Organizing activities by and for adults** will not only help caregivers struggling with coping and supporting the reintegration of their girls (and boys) but will also help the community understand the benefits of children attending CFS/WGFS activities.

- ▶ Ask the children if they are interested in having a 'literacy corner' where older literate children or an adult can teach reading, writing and maths to children with no opportunity to access school – as is the case in many remote villages in South Sudan.
- ▶ Include as many locally made toys and musical instruments as possible (wooden puzzles, for example, could easily be made by formerly associated children).
- ▶ Often, children who already benefit from school also participate in CFS activities, while those out of school may not. Ask the children's advice for developing a system that will reach the community girls (and boys) who need the CFS the most.
- ▶ Try to have a space for babies of formerly associated and other girls, where girls and facilitators can take turns to care for and play with them. This will enable girls with children of their own who would not otherwise be able to come, to benefit from the activities.
- ▶ Promote the establishment of a board of overseers that includes older boys and girls and parents, to keep them involved in the CFS/WGFS.
- ▶ Always follow up on attendance to ensure that the most vulnerable children have access and are participating regularly in the activities.



**Ask older formerly associated children to be facilitators alongside the adults**



**“The best thing in my life  
is going to school.”**



# C.

## **The role of education in the reintegration of formerly associated girls**

**Education is not only a right for children but also plays an important role in the reintegration of formerly associated girls. Going to school is what the girls value the most, and what those who have no access desperately wish for.**

*“The best thing in my life is going to school.”*

*“I like school, it changes my mind. When I’m studying and playing with the others at school, I forget about the bush.”*

*“Nothing is good in my life now; I want to go to school.”*

*“I’m praying to God, if he wishes and the baby starts to walk, I hope I can go back to school.”*

*“I’m thinking about school and hoping I can go next year.”*  
[She is studying tailoring and hopes she will sell some clothes so that she can pay for school].

Of the girls we met, 84 per cent – whether they were at school or not – said school was the most desirable activity in their lives, that it not only brought education but also happiness and hope for the future. This was also true for girls who were in vocational training. 11 of the 12 girls learning a trade said that they would try and find a way to go to school after the training.

In light of the overwhelming desire of formerly associated girls to learn, and the proven psychosocial value of education, DDR and child protection actors must do everything they can to facilitate girls attending school, or accelerated learning classes, where they exist.

## C1: Make every effort to help formerly associated girls access education<sup>vi</sup>

### WHY?

**Research shows that school mitigates the effect of war and trauma on children.** It builds their psychosocial resilience through many processes that takes place there; it provides a structured context which helps distressed children regulate emotions; it allows them to develop a positive identity (and get rid of that of an associated child) and a sense of self-worth through attaining mastery over subject matters. It promotes a sense of purpose and hope; and it offers opportunities for meeting and enjoying association with peers.<sup>17</sup>

### FOR WHOM?

**Girls who cannot access school on their own.** Many families can afford to pay school fees. Child protection and DDR actors should focus their efforts on girls who have no way of paying school fees.

### HOW?

- ▶ Where girls or families have the potential to increase their income through existing small businesses, try to support them. For example:
  - *Give a small investment grant to a girl to expand her Makati or other food preparation business. Note that girls who can are already paying for their, or their siblings', school fees through such very small-scale activities;<sup>18</sup> and/or*
  - *Discuss with the families how they could increase some of their agricultural production to be able to cover their daughter's and other children's school fees, and provide them with seeds, tools, or even a grinding mill that can be shared among several families. Discuss how value can be added to products by refining them, for example by making groundnut and sesame oil, or tomato paste.*

<sup>17</sup> Adapted from "High Hopes, Grim Reality: Reintegration and the Education of Former Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone", 2010. Theresa S. Betancourt, Stephanie Simmons, Ivelina Borisova, Stephanie E. Brewer, Uzo Iweala, and Marie de la Soudiere.

<sup>18</sup> Sometimes referred to as Quick Impact Projects (QIPs).

- ▶ Strive to reach an agreement with some schools to ensure free (or discounted) enrolment for girls formerly associated with armed forces/groups, in exchange for teaching and learning material and/or financial support to the school. Many government schools should be able to accommodate these girls at very low cost. Make sure to involve and coordinate with the Inter-Agency Education Cluster.
- ▶ Some girls will have missed out on years of schooling due to their association or because of child birth, and will need to catch up before they can join their peers. Arrange and promote accelerated learning programme (ALP) classes for girls who cannot return to school immediately. Liaise with the Minister of Education which has a curriculum.
- ▶ Sensitize families when they might not, for cultural or other reasons, allow their daughter to go to school. If the girl has had difficulties finding her place after returning home, explain that going to school will also improve her behaviour.
- ▶ Keep encouraging donors to allocate multi-year grants for the schooling of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups by citing (in funding proposals) the psychosocial benefits of education (see research quoted on previous page) and its importance in preventing child recruitment and re-recruitment by armed groups.

### When formal schooling is not an option:

Many formerly associated girls have never been in school or are illiterate. Being able to write one's name and read signs on stores brings a sense of pride in the girls, and just like formal schooling, it increases their psychosocial wellbeing.

Even where there are no schools, literacy and numeracy classes can easily be organized. If there are already such classes in the area, facilitate the enrolment of formerly associated girls. If there are none, organize classes in the girl's village and include other illiterate girls. Setting up literacy and numeracy classes costs very little. It mostly requires the dedication and good will of the community.

- ▶ Find a volunteer to teach the girls. Ideally, this should be a teacher who would be willing to teach literacy and numeracy after school hours, but anyone who has been to school, even for only a few years, and can read, write and count, could teach the girls. Finding a female teacher is preferable. In places where some of the illiterate girls have been engaged for marriage, classes may only be permitted by the girls' families and future husbands if the teacher is a woman. In such cases, try to find a literate woman in the village to facilitate the class.
- ▶ Find a location: If there is a school in the village, there will surely be a classroom available after school hours. Churches may also allow classes to be held on their premises. If no other place can be found, even outside under a tree will do, except in the rainy season.
- ▶ Unless the class facilitator is already a trained teacher, organize one or two-days of training to review the basics of pedagogy and teaching literacy and numeracy.
- ▶ Start as soon as possible, even before finding a published literacy and numeracy curriculum to guide the class facilitator. This can come later. Life skills training can also be included by, for example, inviting a nurse to talk about reproductive health or someone who can teach conflict-resolution.
- ▶ Agree on a small stipend for the class facilitator and plan for classes to be held at least three times a week for two hours at a time.
- ▶ Procure notebooks, pens and a plastic envelope for each girl so that they can store their material, and some Grade 1 teaching manuals for the facilitator.

**Research shows that school mitigates the effect of war and trauma on children. It builds their psychosocial resilience through many processes that takes place there: it provides a structured context which helps distressed children regulate emotions, it allows them to develop a positive identity and a sense of self-worth through attaining mastery over subject matters, and it promotes a sense of purpose and hope. It also offers opportunities for meeting and enjoying association with peers.**



**Interventions that build on what the girls' families and communities are already doing has a particularly high chance of success**

# D.

## Livelihood support

**Strengthening girls, their families and communities' livelihoods is another way to promote their psychosocial recovery and successful reintegration while at the same time building the resilience and well-being of the whole community. Interventions that build on what the girls' families and communities are already doing has a particularly high chance of success.**

### **D1: Support agriculture and animal husbandry<sup>vii</sup>**

#### **WHY?**

**Agriculture and livestock are intrinsic parts of many communities' main activities.**<sup>19</sup> Most formerly associated girls in Pibor county and Yambio already work with their families in the 'garden'. Whenever they can, families also raise livestock. Cattle is an important part of life in South Sudan, but caring for cattle is usually the domain of boys and men. Women and children are often in charge of caring for small animals such as chickens, sheep and goats. Giving girls the means to raise more abundant and diversified crops, and successfully raise small animals to improve the family's diet and income is the recommended way to help formerly associated girls increase their livelihoods. These interventions have a high chance of success as they build on activities that communities and the girls themselves are already familiar with.

19 "...there are vast opportunities in agriculture, including high demand for agricultural products...as well as for animal resources in the market." This included cereal and a wide range of vegetables and fruit trees. Other opportunities included raising goats, chickens, ducks, as well as fishing and honey production amongst the opportunities [Community Based Reintegration Programme, Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) in South Sudan, March 2015, UNICEF, GPAA and NDDRC].

## HOW?

- ▶ In the immediate term, offer modest agricultural support to girls by giving them tools, seeds and small animals. However, this is only short-term support and must be followed by technical training by agricultural and animal husbandry professionals.
- ▶ Meet The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières, The World Food Programme and other specialized organizations to explore how they could help to train girls to improve agricultural practices and production, and how to successfully raise small animals. An NGO has used a female veterinarian to train girls in animal health skills with great success.
- ▶ Organize technical training for the time needed for girls to acquire solid knowledge and competence. Include girls' mothers or other family members in training when appropriate.
- ▶ If some girls are illiterate, organize literacy and numeracy classes for a minimum of one year so that they can attend alongside the agricultural training. The classes should, at a minimum, offer girls basic literacy and can also include training in record keeping and savings and loans.
- ▶ Provide the necessary inputs (seeds, animals, tools and so on) to maximise the chance of success. For example, in arid lands, investing in "simple irrigation techniques such as pedal-pumps will make a major difference."<sup>20</sup>
- ▶ Provide training in veterinary and para-veterinary skills to ensure the health and survival of animals. An NGO has already trained a significant number of community members who have conducted animal treatments and vaccinations. This skill should also be offered to interested girls, offering benefits to their communities and a livelihood opportunity for them.

20 Community Based Reintegration Programme, Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) in South Sudan, March 2015, UNICEF, GPAA and NDDRC.

## D2: When appropriate, consider vocational training<sup>viii</sup>

### WHY?

**Having a trade can improve a girl's status, sense of self and livelihood, but only if she can manage her business successfully.**

### WHO?

**Training should be considered on a case-by-case basis, according to each girls' personal and family circumstances,** without necessarily excluding those who are in school or attending literacy and numeracy classes: learning a trade could increase their income to cover the costs of their education.

### FOR HOW LONG?

**Long enough for the girls to be truly proficient in their trade.** No training should be less than six months, most should be one year. Also make provision for six to twelve months of business mentoring after completion of training.

### HOW?

- ▶ Girls have to be fully involved but need guidance. They are not knowledgeable about the particular skills needed in some trades, nor about the real potential for earning a living after the training is completed. They will need guidance from DDR and child protection actors, who in turn will consult with the family and the community.
- ▶ Conduct a market assessment to determine how many girls with a particular trade skill will be able to earn a living in their area. This is to ensure that not too many girls are trained in the same skill, as this would immediately oversaturate the market and the girls would not be able to get any or enough customers. We must be conscious of the limitations: *"How many seamstresses can a village or small town accommodate?"*

**Training girls in para-veterinary skills will benefit the whole community while offering them a livelihood**



- ▶ Consult with key community members – community leaders, religious leaders, youth and women’s associations – to discuss some of the vocational training ideas to ensure that these community members are aware of what is being planned, have a chance to give their ideas, and agree to give their support.

**Remember that it’s very difficult, and sometimes even counterproductive, to**  
introduce trades that are not already part of the local economy. Try to build on and strengthen what already exists in the community.

- ▶ Meet with the girls’ parents to seek their consent and to explain that they must ensure that the other responsibilities of the girls (caring for siblings, helping in the fields and so on) will not interfere with her training attendance. Do not offer the training if they do, but wait until the schedule conflict has been resolved.
- ▶ The legal minimum working age for children in South Sudan is 14, so make sure that girls participating in vocational training do not start exercising their trade before they are 14-years-old.
- ▶ Make sure the training does not interfere with school, if the girl is attending.
- ▶ If some girls are illiterate, or have minimal literacy and numeracy competence, arrange for literacy and numeracy classes (or Accelerated Learning Programmes) to be held parallel with the training, for a minimum of one year. If the girls can’t read or count it will be very difficult to successfully handle their business after learning a trade.

- ▶ Always include small business training on record keeping and basic accounting before the girls start practising their trade. Many business fail because the trainees do not know how to calculate cost and manage their business. The training could include guidance by a local savings and loans association on how to jointly save and use funds.
- ▶ Before offering training, ensure that there are resources to give the girls all the tools and material necessary to practice the trade once the training is completed. For example, make sure there are funds to cover start-up kits for seamstresses (machine, needles, thread, scissors, and so on), rent for a market stall or diesel for a grinding mill.
- ▶ Before letting the trained girl or a group of girls start a business, arrange for a six-month apprenticeship with an established business. Apprenticeship has proven to be the best way of ensuring that formally associated children are successful in their trade after training.

### D3: Support for small businesses<sup>ix</sup>

#### WHY?

**Small businesses can increase girls' livelihood and self-esteem.** Several girls told us how much they wanted to increase the small business they already had, and others wanted to start one. The success of a small business will bring pride and increase the girl's well-being.

#### WHO?

**For girls who already have a small business or who want to start a small business**

#### FOR HOW LONG?

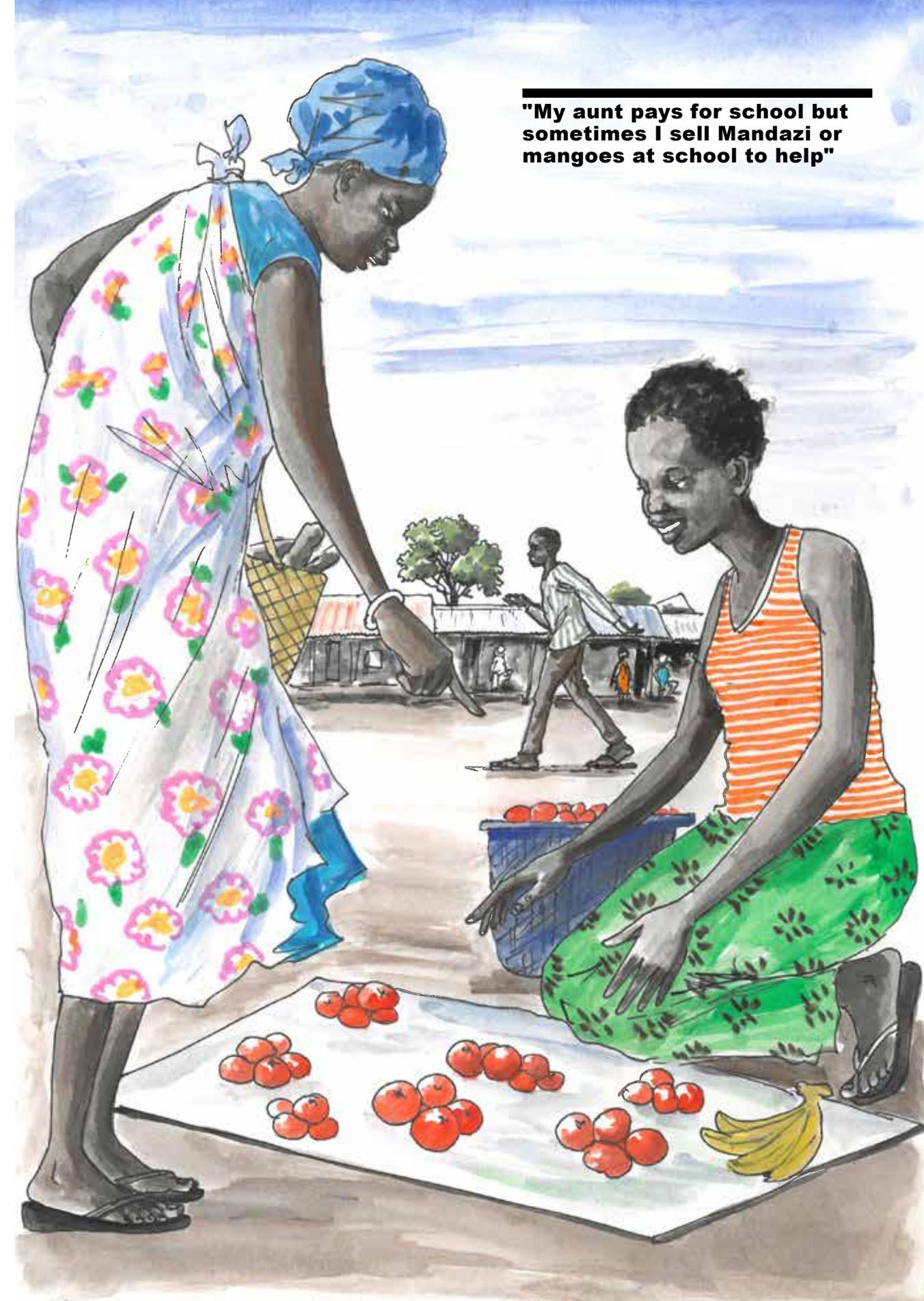
**Support the girls and their businesses for at least six months or more if needed.**

#### HOW?

- ▶ **For girls who want to start a new business:** With members of women associations, meet girls who want a small business and discuss what everyone thinks are viable small businesses in the community. One idea that came up during the research team's visit to a village in Yambio was to have a small fruit press to make and sell fresh mango juice (when in season).
- ▶ **For girls who have a small business:** Visit the girls' existing business and find out how and where it's working. Discuss ideas for expansion and, if needed, suggest some new possibilities such as getting another girl as an associate to increase capacity, or choosing a different location for selling their goods.
- ▶ Meet with the girls' parents to find out what they think about this, and secure their approval to support the girl in improving her business. If the girl is at school, or could go to school, make sure that the business would not interfere with her studies.

- ▶ Before giving any investment grant, organize small business training, including basic accounting and record keeping, even if the business is modest and continue until the girls are proficient at running their business. The training could include guidance by a local savings and loans association on how to jointly save and use funds.
- ▶ If girls are illiterate, or have insufficient knowledge of maths, organize literacy and numeracy classes alongside the business training. Classes should continue until the girls know basic literacy and numeracy.
- ▶ Follow the girls and their businesses for at least six months, or more if needed. After a couple of months, give refresher training on small business management, and if the business is going well, discuss with the girls how they could potentially expand.

**"My aunt pays for school but sometimes I sell Mandazi or mangoes at school to help"**



**Ensuring that girls who have not been officially released have access to some support IF they need it, is crucial.**



# E.

## **Assisting girls who leave armed forces or armed groups independently**

**The research confirmed that most associated girls escape or are unofficially let go from armed forces and armed groups, and often return home without any reintegration support.**

In all four places covered by the research, girls and community members told us they knew a significant number of formerly associated girls in their area. While some may be doing well, others may not. Regardless, all need to have a medical check-up and follow-up after their life in the bush. Any reintegration programme must find ways to identify these girls who may need support while preserving their right to privacy, if this is their wish.

### **E1: Identify girls who are unknown to DDR actors<sup>x</sup>**

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#### **WHY?**

**Girls are more difficult to access than boys and often miss out on official release processes.**

This is because they are rarely considered as 'associated' but seen as 'wives'. Ensuring that girls who have not been officially released have access to some support **IF** they need it is a crucial, but sometimes deprioritized part of reintegration programmes.

#### **WHO?**

**Talk to formerly associated girls already known to DDR actors, and to key community members.**

## HOW?

- ▶ **When talking to formerly associated girls already known:** Ask if they know other girls who have been in the bush and who have not received any support. If they do, find out how many, their approximate ages and any other useful information (for example if they have received a medical check-up). If they are willing to talk to these girls on your behalf, have them ask if they are interested in talking with someone from the DDR programme (a CCPC member or a case worker).
  
- ▶ **When talking to key community members (CCPCs, Girls' Teams, village chiefs, religious leaders, teachers, and so on):** Ask what they know about these unidentified girls and how they are doing. If they are willing to talk to them on your behalf, have them ask if the girls are interested in talking with someone from the DDR programme.
  - *Ask the informants to find out if these girls want the fact that they have been associated to remain confidential. If so, have them assure the girls that the confidentiality of their association will be respected, for example through meeting them in a neutral place, which cannot be readily identified as belonging to a 'DDR programme'.*
  
  - *Be sure to tell the informants not to make any promises to these girls, but at the same time to give them information on all available services including medical attention, and how they can access them. They can also offer to accompany girls to facilitate their accessing the particular service(s) they require.*

**Any reintegration programme must find ways to identify girls who have escaped or been unofficially let go from armed forces and armed groups, and who may need support while preserving their right to privacy, if this is their wish.**



# F.

## Respond to sexual violence experienced in the bush

**Most of the girls we met had suffered terrible and repeated rapes.<sup>21</sup> Some conceived children in the bush, sometimes returning home after their escape with one or more babies.**

The social consequences of rape vary across South Sudan and depend on the ethnic group and the circumstances of the rape. The girls we met talked, unsolicited, about the fact that they had been raped. *"They did not ask for sex,"* one girl said, *"they raped us"*. Several girls also told us how, on their escape and return home, they had told their mothers everything that happened. It seems that, in the Yambio communities, sexual violence perpetrated by an armed man while a girl is captive 'in the bush' does not bring social rejection of the girl as it does in many traditional communities around the world, and, according to some reports, in some parts of South Sudan.

The girls who returned from the bush were warmly welcomed by their families, as were their babies. Communities also received them without any discrimination on account of 'having known men' outside of marriage. Girls in Pibor and Yambio communities told us their association would not be an issue for their future marriage, and two of them told us that since their return they had married men who knew all about what happened to them while associated. Both had a baby. This has been immensely helpful to the girls' psychosocial recovery and reintegration. At the same time, these experiences were terrifying and painful, and as such being raped was part of the deep traumatic toll that 'bush life' had on the girls and that actors supporting them must address.

<sup>21</sup> Many boys have also suffered from sexual violence. However, as the Guide focuses on girls it does not cover a response for boys.

## **F1: Ensure that all formerly associated girls receive medical and psychosocial attention<sup>xi</sup>**

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### **WHY?**

**All girls need a minimum level of medical attention and psychosocial support to recover physically and emotionally from the sexual violence experienced.**

### **HOW?**

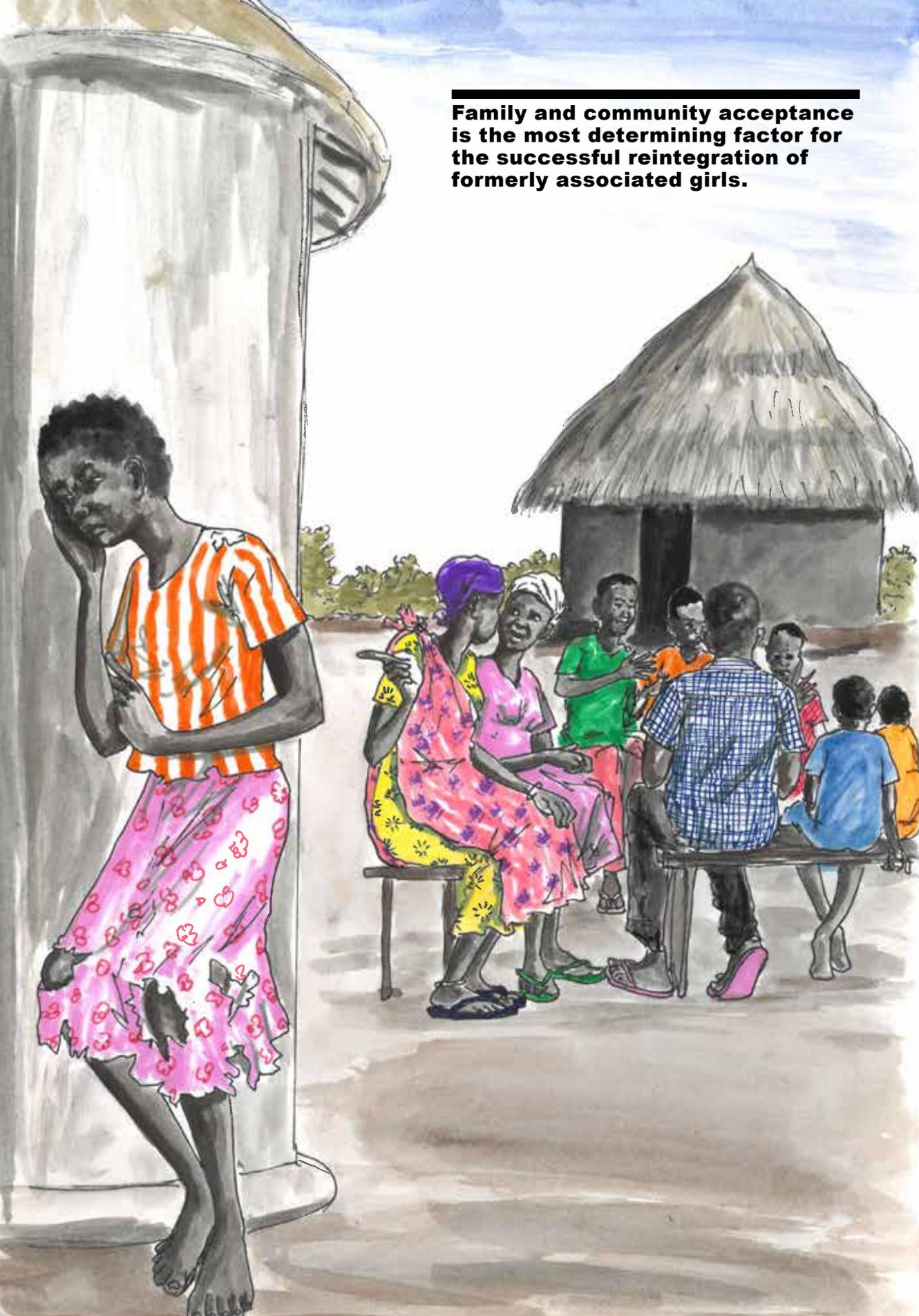
- ▶ All girls must receive a medical check-up for sexually transmitted diseases, including voluntary counselling and testing for HIV, and medication and follow-up if found positive.
- ▶ All girls must also receive a follow-up medical check-up for their reproductive health status, as some diseases or damage may only show up later. This includes injuries that could lead to fistula, especially for survivors who experienced multiple rapes or who delivered under difficult circumstances.
- ▶ Counselling and other reintegration activities offered by DDR, child protection and GBV actors (see Section B2 on 'Supportive Listening') will also help the majority of girls recover from the sexual violence they suffered. These services and activities will also help to identify girls who may need more specialized counselling and support.
- ▶ Thanks-giving and forgiveness prayers (see Section B3 on guilt) should be encouraged for all girls as they are also useful to 'wash away' that aspect of what happened in the bush, and as such contribute to their psychosocial recovery.
- ▶ GBV actors can offer more specialized services if needed. If a girl continues to be distressed several months after receiving 'supportive listening' and does not want to participate in any community activities, refer her to an GBV actor for more professional counselling and support.

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**! Do not push girls to come forward or to talk about sexual violence experienced unless they raise it themselves.** When meeting girls, talk about sexual violence in general terms, say for example 'we know that many women and girls all over the country have suffered from sexual violence, if you know anyone who might need medical attention or someone to talk to, tell them to contact [your organization, a health clinic or any other relevant actors providing support in the area]'. This way you will have informed them about existing support, and they can make the choice to use it or not.

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**Family and community acceptance is the most determining factor for the successful reintegration of formerly associated girls.**



# G.

## **Promoting family and community acceptance when girls are rejected**

**Even though in many parts of South Sudan formerly associated girls are well received by families and communities, this is not always the case. There are enough first-hand accounts of situations where girls are turned away by family and/or shunned by their communities, to know that this is a real and important concern.**

The reasons for rejection of formerly associated girls may vary vastly from area to area. Rejection may be linked to politics, such as when a girl who was associated with the government forces returns to her opposition-sympathizing community. Or it can come out of the feeling that the girl has been in a place where bad things happened and that could bring bad luck to the community. Another reason could be that the family is worried about not getting enough bride price because their daughter has 'been with men', or perhaps because they cannot accept that her behaviour has changed, that she acts too independent and no longer like the obedient child they remember. There may be other reasons specific to circumstances and the community concerned.

### The story of Nyalima from Unity state

Nyalima<sup>22</sup> was 16-years-old when she was abducted from her village by the SPLA-IO in 2015. Seven soldiers, and two women, took her as she was grinding cereal to feed her siblings. When they reached the camp, she was given to a middle-aged man who forced her to sleep with him. The man said he would marry her and give the required cows to her parents but he never did. Nyalima cooked for the soldiers, and 'served' the man to whom she had been given. She became pregnant but had a miscarriage. After seven months, Nyalima managed to escape with the help of another girl who was a soldier.

When she arrived home, Nyalima was not accepted by her uncle with whom she had been living and she was chased away. She asked a traditional leader for help but was turned down. She went to her aunt, 80 kilometers away, but was not even allowed to take water when she arrived. She was insulted and called "*prostitute, useless girl*". In desperation she went to another town where she found a soldier who 'married' her. She felt she had no alternative as she had no food or any way to support herself.<sup>23</sup>

After what the girls have suffered in the bush – terror, physical and emotional abuse, extraordinary hardships, loneliness and daily threats of death – they need and deserve understanding, kindness, and emotional support to heal and resume their development.

Instead, some are met with suspicion, humiliation, discrimination, and community rejection. These girls are hurt, and, in these cases, the community's attitude is often the source of their deepest emotional suffering and sometimes depression.

<sup>22</sup> Her name has been changed to protect her privacy.

<sup>23</sup> Report on girl soldiers in Payinjjar County, prepared by the Bonglac Foundation for Research and Social Transformation (BOFRAST) for Child Soldiers International, October 2018

**“Improved community acceptance was associated with reduced depression... and increased prosocial attitudes.”<sup>24</sup>**

Previous research on reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups shows that the level of family and community acceptance is the most determining factor in predicting a successful reintegration. For this reason, in situations of rejection, the various ways through which family and community benevolence towards girls can be promoted must be identified.

### **G1: Consult key community members on how to influence community attitudes<sup>xii</sup>**

#### **WHY?**

**The community is the best placed to guide the response.** There are always ways to re-establish trust and acceptance between a girl and her family and community, but each situation and culture is different. Each DDR, child protection or GBV actor will have to find what is right for the circumstances in their area.

#### **WHO?**

**The most influential community members.** First, learn about the hierarchical organization of the community (this applies mainly to actors not from the community in which they are working). Once this is known, meet the most important people in that community and explain the role of the DDR organization in facilitating the reintegration of formerly associated children, including girls.

#### **WHEN?**

**As soon as possible.** These consultations should preferably begin before girls return to the community, to ensure that they are understood and welcomed upon their return.

<sup>24</sup> Sierra Leone's Former Child Soldiers: A Follow-up Study of Psychosocial Adjustment and Community Reintegration 2010 - Theresa Stichick Betancourt, Sc.D., M.A.,<sup>1</sup> Ivelina Ivanova Borisova, Ed.M.,<sup>2</sup> Timothy Philip Williams, M.S.W., M.Sc.,<sup>3</sup> Robert T. Brennan, Ph.D., Ed.M.,<sup>4</sup> T. Hatch Whitfield, Sc.D.,<sup>5</sup> Marie de la Soudière, M.S.W.,<sup>6</sup> John Williamson, M.S.W.,<sup>7</sup> and Stephen E. Gilman, Sc.D.<sup>8</sup>

## HOW?

- ▶ **Learn about the hierarchical organization of the community:** Who has the power to change families' attitudes and behaviors?
  - *For example, in Nuer communities, the most important people would be the Executive Chief and the Council of Women's Leaders (Tihat).<sup>25</sup> The Executive Chief is responsible for maintaining harmony among his people. He has power and is esteemed by his community. He handles various types of disputes including at the family level. Women's Leaders handle girls and women's issues. After listening to the girls' problem, they talk to the mother and other female relatives and mediate the situation. If this is not successful, they refer the case to the Chief.*
- ▶ **Before talking about formerly associated girls' issues,** find out what these influential community members know about the girls and how they view their present circumstances. This is to learn the general situation and whether these people are sympathetic to the girls' plight or, on the other hand, whether efforts to inform, sensitize and win their support are needed for them to become critical allies.
- ▶ **The girls themselves can often show us the way,** so meet and listen to as many formerly associated girls as possible before deciding on a course of action for the programme.

### **Examples of issues to learn about to help guide the response:**

*Make sure the girl knows why you are meeting and spend a little time to get to know each other. Ask who she is living with and which activities she is participating in. Is she part of a church and does she attend services? How much does she help at home? Who are her friends? What matters most to her? Listen for what she may say about feeling isolated, angry or depressed, and find out if she has someone (a family member, a friend, someone at church) to talk to and confide in.*

*Find out how it was for her when she returned home; how she was received by her family and community. If there are or have been problems, ask for specifics; if she knows the reason why she has not been treated well and if she has any ideas of what could be done to make her (and other girls) accepted.*

*Together, explore ideas of what could be done. Think about: Who in the community would be the most important person to talk to and who could help change her family and community's attitude? What activities could she get involved in that could help change her family's and community's attitude?*

*Ask if she knows other formerly associated girls who have returned home and if so, how they are doing.*

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- ! **Supporting initiatives that girls list as helping them to move on is key.** By asking what makes them feel accepted and/or unaccepted, actors can ensure the efficacy of their programmes. For instance, if girls say they are comfortable sharing any issues with their friends, actors should work with youth groups or peer-to-peer support groups and offer them training in 'supportive listening' so they can reach even more girls. If girls say they confide in their grandmothers or other family members, actors should enhance this by putting in place support groups for caregivers to enable them to share with other adults and help each other.
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25 Interview with the Bonglac Foundation for Research and Social Transformation (BOFRAST), December 2018.

Interventions G2 - G6 below are examples that lead to increased family and community acceptance, while lessening girls' emotional suffering:

## **G2: Sensitize and support families and communities<sup>xiii</sup>**

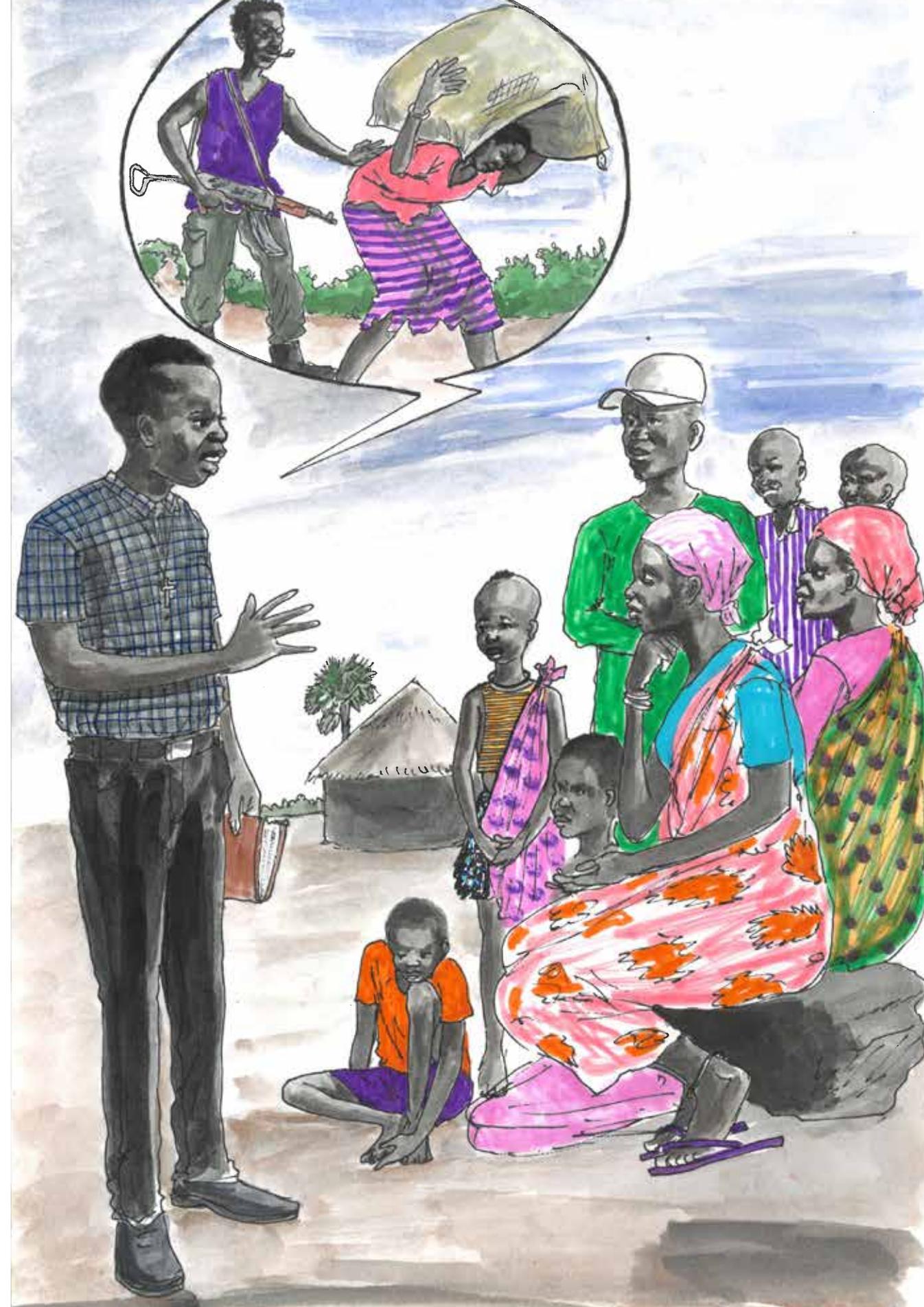
### **WHY?**

**Family and community acceptance are crucial for psychosocial recovery and reintegration.** If a girl is not fully accepted by those around her it will be very hard for her to heal and reintegrate into her community.

### **HOW?**

- ▶ Organize as many meetings with families, chiefs and other influential community members as necessary until they understand that girls must not be punished for their association. Once these influential community members are convinced that the girls are worthy of their attention and support, they can sensitize the rest of the community. Let them guide any response needed for girls to regain the respect and acceptance of their family and community..
- ▶ At the same time, give some direct assistance to the community, for example, by offering a small grant to support a community project. It can be a modest amount spent on anything decided by a group of influential community members for the benefit of the community. It could be used to buy material for the local school, agricultural tools to share, a common plot of land to farm or perhaps a new musical instrument for the church.

**! Attention combined with direct assistance changes community attitudes:** There is a positive impact among community members and how they perceive formerly associated children when a DDR or child protection actor shows interest in these children while also bringing some resources to their community.



### **G3: Promote and help create a 'Community Reintegration Action Group'<sup>26</sup>**

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#### **WHY?**

**It can be helpful to have key community members support girls when stigma is an issue.** The aim of these groups is to promote community acceptance and respect for the girls through two strategies:

- **Regularly sensitize families and the communities** about the girls' past and present suffering to change their attitude towards them;
- **Develop concrete actions** to be taken by influential community members to overcome the barriers these girls face.

#### **WHO?**

**The most influential members of the community.**

The group should include at least one or more key community members who have enough influence to promote community acceptance: chiefs, religious leaders, representative from women's associations, youth groups leaders, teachers, and so on.

#### **HOW?**

- ▶ Sensitize members to the emotional suffering of the girls, discussing what they have suffered 'in the bush', the impact of their past and current experiences, and the fact that they are victims and do not deserve blame.
- ▶ Explain how girls' bad behaviour is often a reaction to the community's rejection, and the responsibility families and communities have for helping the girls find their rightful places again. Explain that if families and communities accept the girls and treat them like their other daughters, the girls' behaviour, will in turn improve.

26 Or any other appropriate name chosen by the members.

- ▶ Ask each of them to give their own ideas of ways how the community acceptance of the girls can be improved and discuss strategies to achieve this.
- ▶ Ask each of them what they can personally contribute to promote family and community acceptance. This could be sensitization of other community members or families they know, inviting girls to join in some community activities they are excluded from and so on. They will surely have a lot of ideas, and, once oriented, they will define how they will contribute to increasing acceptance in different sectors of the community.

### **G4: Ensure that formerly associated girls participate in beneficial community activities<sup>xiv</sup>**

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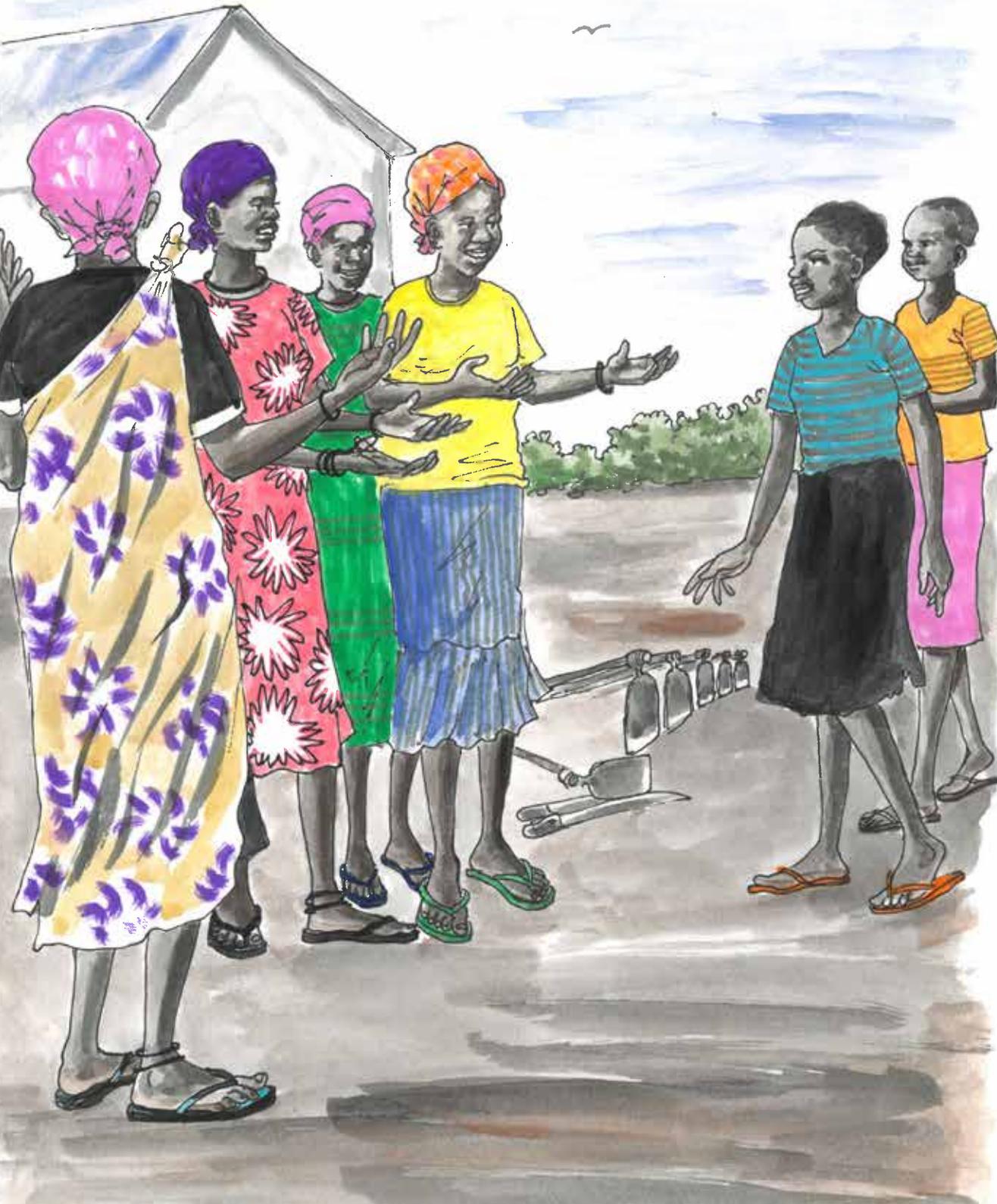
#### **WHY?**

**This is an excellent way to promote girls psychosocial recovery and reintegration** while helping them regain acceptance and value in the eyes of their families and community (see the meaning of 'Psychosocial' on p.27 and the diagram on p.28).

#### **HOW?**

- ▶ Identify existing community activities suitable for girls and make sure that those interested can participate in them (see Section B5). If they are interested but not participating, meet with the organizers and sensitize them to the fact that some girls are excluded. The reason for them not participating could be that they have small children: if this is the case make sure they know that babies are also welcome.
- ▶ Consider offering some additional material to strengthen the groups and activities identified: for example, recreational material for youth groups, or threads, needles and scissors for embroidery to a women's association, or seeds and/or small animals to a women's farming association.

**Consider offering some material to strengthen existing activities such as seeds or tools to a women's farming association so they can integrate more girls as members.**



- ▶ If the girl is part of a church, find out how well she is included in faith-based activities, including regular choir and dance practice, in addition to the weekly holy service. Meet the priest/pastor/imam if there seems to be some discrimination and facilitate the girl's full participation in all that the place of worship has to offer.
- ▶ If there is no Child-Friendly Space (CFS) or Women- and Girl-Friendly Space (WGFS), set one up with the participation of the girls. If there is a CFS/WGFS, but some girls are not participating, talk to the girls' parents, her future husband if she's engaged, and to the girl, to facilitate her participation (see Section B6).
- ▶ Occasionally, facilitate activities for adults at the CFS/WGFS. Activities by and for adults will not only support caregivers struggling with coping and supporting the reintegration of their girls (and boys) but will also help engage the community to understand the benefits of children attending CFS activities.
- ▶ Some girls may have young children of their own and may find it more difficult to participate in CFS/WGFS for that reason. To the extent possible, try to have a space for babies of formerly associated and other vulnerable girls, where girls and animators can take turns in caring for and playing with them.
- ▶ Find out if there is a way to help girls go to school. Talk to the family, make a material or financial donation to the school, sponsor school fees if the family can't afford them, or help the girl earn a little money to pay for school (see Sections C1 and D3). This can be done through helping her increase food production and sales of vegetables, for example by providing seeds, agricultural tools and training. Refer her to any agricultural or animal husbandry programme if such programmes exist in her area (The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières, The World Food Programme and others).
- ▶ If the girl is illiterate, refer her to a literacy and numeracy programme. If none exist in her area, organize literacy and numeracy classes: this is easy and not expensive (see Section C1).

## **G5: Increase opportunities for 'supportive listening'<sup>xv</sup>**

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### **WHY?**

**Supportive listening is an immediate and efficient way to foster psychosocial healing.**

At the same time, having someone taking an interest in a formerly associated girl who is stigmatized may help change the views of other community members as they see how the listener values the girl enough to talk to and listen to her.

### **WHO?**

**Community volunteers with the needed qualities.** Identify volunteers who are willing and able to provide regular listening support. These listeners could be any community member whom the girl trusts and who has the required qualities of a good listener: patience, kindness, the ability to be non-judgmental and respect for confidentiality.

### **FOR HOW LONG?**

**Supportive listening visits must be made regularly for a minimum of six months.** The volunteers need to be ready to commit for a minimum of six months or until the girl feels that it's no longer needed. This will enable trust to develop between the listener and the girl. This trust is an important element of psychosocial recovery after traumatic experiences.

### **HOW?**

- ▶ Help all girls who do not already have a confidant (a family member, a friend or someone from church) and who want someone to talk to, to find someone.
- ▶ Train and orient the volunteer listeners. The initial training could be done in a week, but volunteers must also receive regular supervision and support, as well as shorter refresher training sessions on a regular basis, perhaps every two to three months. The training should include, but not be limited to, learning how to talk and listen to formerly associated girls (see Section B2).

- ▶ The key element of supportive listening is to make the girl feel that she is important and that the listener cares for her. It aims to strengthen the girl's resilience by helping her focus on the positive aspects of her life, and by giving her good advice.

## **G6: Facilitate cleansing ceremonies where beneficial<sup>xvi</sup>**

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### **WHY?**

**Cleansing ceremonies promote acceptance of stigmatized girls and their children.** The use of safe traditional ceremonies that symbolize healing and cleansing performed by the Chief or another spiritual leader will both contribute to girls' psychosocial well-being and promote their full re-entry into their families and communities. For communities that believe children born out of rape can be cleansed and accepted through a private ceremony, this should be supported (Also see Section B3).

### **HOW?**

- ▶ If the family, the Chief, the women elders, or the girl herself indicate that she would need such a ceremony, facilitate this, but make sure to ask the advice of the family and the women elders.
- ▶ If the family is too poor to be able to offer the Chief or whoever is conducting the ceremony, what is expected to undertake it, also be prepared to facilitate this.

## **Annex 1: Research Summary on girls associated with armed forces and armed groups in South Sudan**

The joint UNICEF-Child Soldier International research summarized here aimed to gather information on the situation and reintegration needs of girls formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups in South Sudan, how they were faring after having left the armed force or armed group and were back at home, and their perception of what was helpful to them during their reintegration phase.

In August and September 2018, the research team travelled to Juba, Pibor, Bentiu and Yambio, for a period of four weeks. The team met with 48 girls formerly associated with armed forces and groups who had either escaped or been unofficially released, over 150 adults, including members of the government, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and communities, 23 formerly associated boys, 12 war-affected girls who had not been associated, and four families of associated girls (see Annex 2 for table of research participants).

### **Methodology**

The research framework was developed using information gathered during the desk-based research and preparation phase and through extensive consultations with South Sudanese NGOs and United Nations actors.

The information was gathered through individual interviews with girls as well as focus group discussions with disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and child protection actors, and community members, including formerly associated boys. All interviews with the girls (and boys) were organized and conducted in accordance with the UNICEF guidelines on interviewing children,<sup>27</sup> similar guidelines in the Paris Principles,<sup>28</sup> and Child Soldiers International's Ethical Guidelines on Research Involving Children.<sup>29</sup> All members of the research team were women, and no other adults or NGO staff were present during the interviews.

Most of the girls met were still participating in or had previously gone through a DDR programme facilitated by UNICEF and their partners, and were therefore introduced to the research

27 UNICEF Guidelines for interviewing children: [https://www.unicef.org/esaro/5440\\_guidelines\\_interview.html](https://www.unicef.org/esaro/5440_guidelines_interview.html)

28 The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed forces or Armed Groups, 2007: <https://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/ParisPrinciples310107English.pdf> (paragraphs 7.25 - 7.29).

29 Child Soldiers International, Ethical Guidelines for research involving children and their families, 2016: <https://www.child-soldiers.org/research-policy>

team by these actors. However, some girls in the Bentiu Protection of Civilian site and Pibor were identified after focus group interviews with community members who then introduced the research team to some girls not yet known to DDR actors.

The interview questions directed to the girls were structured into three sections.

- The first section focused on the girls' lives before their association with the armed force or armed group: whom they lived with before they became associated, whether they had been going to school, their everyday activities, and what they enjoyed the most.
- In the second section, the girls described the circumstances that had led to their association with an armed force or armed group. If they wished, they had the opportunity to talk about their experience while with the group: their role, their day-to-day life, and how they managed to leave the group.
- Finally, the girls talked about returning to their families and communities. The interviews were designed to highlight the kind of support the girls had received (internally, from the family and community, and externally from DDR actors). In cases where assistance was lacking, we asked what form of support would be most helpful to them. The girls were encouraged to talk about the activities they currently value, for example going to church or talking with friends, to support them in focusing on their strengths and resilience, and the positive elements of their lives.

### **The main points learned included the following: from the girls:**

- 1. Extent of girls' association:** The research confirmed that thousands of girls have already escaped or been unofficially let go and are back in their communities. Most of the formerly associated boys and girls met said there were many girls, ranging from five to fifty and above, with them in the armed force/group, and that many were left behind when they managed to escape.

In the forthcoming releases, 30 to 40 per cent of demobilized children should be expected to be girls. Judging from past events, a significant percentage will

not be officially released, as many commanders do not recognise girls as associated, but will continue to escape or otherwise return home on their own (see Section E on assisting girls who leave armed forces and armed groups independently).

The logistical and financial resources required to facilitate the reintegration of this large number of girls (and boys) is addressed in Section B on supporting families and communities to respond to the psychosocial needs of girls. It is clear that the existing reintegration programmes in their current form would rapidly be overwhelmed with the next few expected releases.

- 2. Recruitment circumstances:** 39 girls were abducted/forcibly recruited and 9 girls were encouraged to join by family members or joined for protection reasons. Most were between 8 and 15 years old at the time of recruitment. Girls were recruited and used by the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA IO - TD and RM), the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF), the South Sudan Democratic Army Cobra Faction (led by David Yau Yau), and the South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM).
- 3. The role of girls while associated:** Most of the girls were used as domestic and sexual slaves, and as 'wives' to adult fighters. At the same time, many were trained in how to march, handle a gun, and go on looting missions, although not all of them used their guns. Many were also forced to commit acts of violence against other children or adults. Most of the girls spent one to three years with the armed force or armed group, with some spending one to three months. A couple of the girls were only associated for an hour or a day.
- 4. Demobilization:** All the girls met had escaped or had been unofficially let go by the armed force or armed group. Most escaped on their own or with other children and/or adults while pretending to fetch water or firewood, or during an attack. Some were told to go home by their commanders when the armed group had signed a peace deal with the Government.
- 5. Emotional and psychosocial support:** Traumatic experiences of life while associated were felt strongly immediately after the girls escaped or otherwise returned home, but with time, and help from various sources, the emotional distress greatly diminished, and in some cases was even overcome. Talking to their mothers or other family

members, spending time with their friends, and singing, dancing, and praying in church were raised by most girls as what helped them most. For those who were at school, the latter was added as a strong source of joy and pride. Religious leaders were also consulted by the families of returning girls, and the ceremonies performed had a calming and healing effect on the girls and their families. In the two cases where girls had not been well received by their community who spoke ill of them, community figureheads, such as the village chief, were called upon to intervene and communities immediately ceased to disparage the girls.

- 6. Families support schooling for the girls:** Many girls quickly went back to school after having escaped or otherwise left the armed group, most with the help of their family but some of the girls themselves supplemented, for example by selling vegetables, mandasi/makati or working in someone else's field. For all girls, going to and finishing school was the wish most strongly expressed. Being in school represents much more than getting an education, it brings a host of psychosocial benefits: these are particularly important in the case of formerly associated girls as it helps them regain self-confidence, develop a positive status in their community and hope for the future. It builds their resilience and greatly contributes to their overcoming the trauma of having been associated.
- 7. Everyone farms:** In both Pibor and Yambio, the majority of girls were engaged in small scale farming with their families, often mothers, aunts, or grandmothers. Many talked about how much they enjoyed 'working in the garden'.
- 8. External support:** Most girls had been home for a couple of months to two years before meeting a DDR or child protection actor or receiving support from an external actor. Although some were not yet known to DDR actors and had not received any reintegration support. Some girls were taken to an interim care centre to receive a medical check-up and counselling, and some spent up to six months there even though they had already been back home with their families. Most girls received school bags with utensils and clothes, and some also got their school fees paid or received vocational training (sewing, IT or driving). In Yambio, all girls received regular visits from a case worker/social worker which they greatly appreciated. Girls also participated in Child-Friendly Spaces or other recreational activities. As part of the larger humanitarian response, some families had received chickens, a goat, food supplies or seeds.

## Annex 2: Table of research participants

Affiliation	Entities	People met
Non-governmental organizations	29	40
United Nations agencies	4	10
Government (The Republic of South Sudan's National DDR Commission, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, the South Sudan People's Defense Forces)	3	3
<b>Focus Groups Discussions</b>		
Community women	5	47
Community men	2	14
Religious and traditional leaders	4	34
Social Reintegration Committee	1	7
Child Protection Committee	1	5
Children		
Formerly associated girls		48
Formerly associated boys		23
Non-associated girls from affected communities		12
<b>Other persons met</b>		
Formerly associated woman		1
Family members of formerly associated girls		4
Additional accounts of the association circumstances of five girls were relayed to us in full by their social worker or close family member		

## Annex 3: NGOs, Government and United Nations actors participating in the research:

### Government

The Republic of South Sudan's National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Commission – Juba  
 The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission – Pibor  
 The South Sudan People's Defence Forces HQ, 4th Division – Bentiu

### NGOs

Amnesty International  
 Bonglac Foundation for Research and Social Transformation – Juba  
 Catholic Medical Mission Board – Yambio  
 Child's Destiny and Development Organization – Juba and Bentiu  
 Children Charity Organisation – Bentiu  
 Confident Children Out of Conflict – Juba  
 Community Action Organisation – Juba  
 Danish Refugee Council – Bentiu  
 Grassroot Empowerment and Development Organisation – Pibor  
 Greater Upper Nile Organisation – Bentiu  
 Hold the Child – Juba  
 Human Rights Watch  
 International Rescue Committee – Juba and Bentiu  
 INTERSOS – Juba and Pibor  
 International Committee of the Red Cross – Bentiu  
 Initiative for Peace Communication Association – Juba  
 Mercy Corps – Bentiu  
 Médecins Sans Frontières – Juba  
 Nile Hope – Juba  
 Nonviolent Peace force – Bentiu  
 Oxfam – Pibor  
 Plan International – Pibor  
 Save the Children – Juba  
 Terre des Hommes – Juba  
 Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse – Juba and Pibor  
 Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Germany – Juba and Pibor  
 Voice of Peace – Pibor  
 Women Vision South Sudan – Bentiu  
 World Vision International – Yambio  
 ZOA – Pibor

### United Nations agencies

FAO – Yambio  
 UNICEF – Juba, Pibor, Bentiu and Yambio  
 UNHCR – Bentiu  
 UNMISS – Boma and Yambio

## Endnotes

- i *“Planning for programmes should emphasize community engagement, involve children and the communities to which they return, build on existing resources and take account of the rights and aspirations of children, balanced with community priorities and values [...]”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.4
- “Assistance at the release or reintegration stages should aim to enable children leaving an armed force or armed group to assume a place within their community and standard of living comparable to that of other children of the same age. Circumstances vary, and it should not be assumed that all children who have been associated with an armed force or armed group require direct material assistance in order to reintegrate. [...] Benefits in terms of services should be structured and provided in a manner that does not either stigmatize or inappropriately privilege children or place them at risk. This is generally best achieved by providing support to children, families, and communities. [...]”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.33
- “The capacity of the family and community to care for and protect all children affected by conflict should be developed and supported from the earliest possible stage. Dialogue with the communities to which children will return or be integrated into should be initiated at the earliest possible opportunity. As much as possible and when in the best interests of the child, this should be done before release in order to clarify their concerns and strengthen the community’s understanding of their own roles and responsibilities with regard to released children. [...] These discussions should set the stage for community initiatives to support the released children along with other vulnerable children in the community. [...]”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.37-38
- ii *“Children should be allowed the opportunity to talk individually or in a group about their future or about past experiences, if they wish to do so. There should not be an expectation that children have to “open up” and counselling should not be forced on them. Most children benefit from a sensitive combination of traditional approaches and opportunities for supportive conversations.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.75.5.
- iii *“Culturally appropriate approaches to assisting children with emotional and behavioural problems should be identified and assessed. [...]”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.75.1

- iv *“[...] Their [adolescents] full participation should be included in the assessment, design and implementation of programmes. Engaging children in community service and helping them enter respected social roles are essential in breaking stigma and enabling children to develop appropriate support networks in the community.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.48
- “Psychosocial support should focus on identifying and addressing any obstacles to the ability to develop an appropriate social role and engage in culturally expected social relationships.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.74.
- “Links should be established and maintained with existing women’s groups, as social activities reduce the girls’ isolation and promote their well-being.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.65
- “The development of strong networks of peer support through youth groups or other community based programmes such as girls’ clubs can allow young people to work together to solve problems, develop social competencies appropriate to civilian life and define their roles and responsibilities in their community.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.75.0
- v *“The development of strong networks of peer support through youth groups or other community based programmes such as girls’ clubs can allow young people to work together to solve problems, develop social competencies appropriate to civilian life and define their roles and responsibilities in their community.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.75.0
- vi *“Education, vocational and skills training and/or opportunities to support their own and their family’s livelihoods are essential elements for reintegration. Reintegration programmes should allow and encourage access for all groups, including children who need child care facilities. [...]”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.77
- “Educational activities should take into account the children’s lost educational opportunities, their age and stage of development, their experiences with armed forces or armed groups and the potential to promote psychosocial well being, including a sense of self worth. Children with disability should be included in educational activities with their peers. [...] ; Accelerated learning programmes suitable for adolescents who have missed years of school should be compatible with and recognised by the formal system of education; Alternative forms of education such as adult literacy classes or evening classes should be offered to children who cannot or do not wish to enter the formal educational system.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.78-82

- vii *“Consultation with communities should develop local programmes such as collective initiatives that benefit small groups of children and the community they return to.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.83.2
- viii *“Provision should be made for relevant vocational training and opportunities for employment, suitable for the needs of all girls and boys including those with disabilities.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.83
- ix *“Children who need to earn a living immediately upon return to their family and community should have opportunities to do so while they obtain professional training and/or an improved education.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.83.5
- x *“Preparation [of DDR programmes] should include a strategy to meet the needs both of children who enter a release process and those who do not go through any kind of process but leave armed forces or armed groups and either return to their family and community or seek to integrate elsewhere.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.5  
*“Programmes to assist girls associated with armed forces or armed groups need to strike a careful balance between seeking to identify them in order to ensure their particular needs are met and not stigmatizing them further. The key to any intervention is to consult with and be led by those affected [...].”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.60
- xi *“In many contexts, girls who have been associated with armed forces or armed groups are highly likely to have been subjected to gender based violence (GBV), including sexual violence. [...]. Programmes should include measures to deal with the physical impact of GBV on survivors, such as including injury, reproductive health problems including infertility, fistula and sexually transmitted infections, as well as the risks and results of early pregnancy and induced abortion or miscarriage or birth without adequate medical care; [...]. Any programme offering girls access to medical facilities for GBV should also link in with girls or women’s groups to ensure emotional support is available to address the psychosocial impact of GBV, including stigma, discrimination and depression.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.72.0-3
- xii *“Planning for programmes should emphasize community engagement, involve children and the communities to which they return, build on existing resources and take account of the rights and aspirations of children, balanced with community priorities and values [...].”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.4
- xiii *“Girls face specific consequences from their time in armed forces or armed groups. The stigma facing girls is fundamentally different in kind – it lasts much longer, is critically more difficult to reduce and is more severe. Essentially, many girls will have lost their “value” as perceived by the community including in relation to marriage. Programmes should seek to establish positive values for the girls in their communities and families. [...].”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.59  
*“Extensive community dialogue and mediation is needed to support girls’ reintegration. Key messages are that girls, especially those who are pregnant or girl mothers need the support of their family and community. Strategies should enable girls’ acceptance through steps such as conducting traditional rituals, making reparations, providing health care and livelihoods support, and developing links with women’s groups.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.61
- xiv *“[...] Their [adolescents] full participation should be included in the assessment, design and implementation of programmes. Engaging children in community service and helping them enter respected social roles are essential in breaking stigma and enabling children to develop appropriate support networks in the community.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.48  
*“Psychosocial support should focus on identifying and addressing any obstacles to the ability to develop an appropriate social role and engage in culturally expected social relationships.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.74.  
*“Links should be established and maintained with existing women’s groups, as social activities reduce the girls’ isolation and promote their well-being.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.65
- xv *“Children should be allowed the opportunity to talk individually or in a group about their future or about past experiences, if they wish to do so. There should not be an expectation that children have to “open up” and counselling should not be forced on them. Most children benefit from a sensitive combination of traditional approaches and opportunities for supportive conversations.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.75.5.
- xvi *“In some communities, children are viewed and view themselves as carrying bad spirits from their experiences with armed forces or armed groups. Appropriate cultural practices, as long as they are not harmful to children, can be essential to a child’s reintegration and should be supported.”* The Paris Principles, 2007, § 7.53