

Yvonne Kemper

Youth in

Approaches of

War-to-Peace Transitions

International Organizations

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Table of Contents

Executive summary.....	3
Introduction.....	5
1 Definitions and Concepts	8
1.1 Defining ‘Youth’	8
1.2 Demobilization and Reintegration in Post-Conflict Situations	10
2 A Rights–Based Approach	14
2.1 The Rights-Based Approach: Finding a Legal Framework for Youth	14
2.2 The Approach in Practice.....	17
<i>Save the Children: DRP for Former Child Soldiers in DRC.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>UNICEF: Participation of Young People in DDR in Sierra Leone.....</i>	<i>20</i>
2.3 Value of Approach for Post-Conflict Peace Building.....	22
3 An Economic Approach.....	24
3.1 The Economic Approach: Making the Case for Investing in Youth.....	24
3.2 The Approach in Practice.....	28
<i>World Bank: Urban Youth Employment & Empowerment Project in Nigeria.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>OTI: Youth Reintegration Training & Education for Peace Program in Sierra Leone</i>	<i>31</i>
3.3 Value of Approach for Post-Conflict Peace Building.....	33
4 A Socio-Political Approach	36
4.1 The Socio-Political Approach: Youth - a Peace Constituency?.....	36
4.2 The Approach in Practice.....	39
<i>UNDP: Youth Post-Conflict Participation Project in Kosovo</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>SFCG’s Youth Projects in Burundi and Sierra Leone.....</i>	<i>41</i>
4.3 Value of Approach for Post-Conflict Peace Building.....	43
5 Towards a Holistic Approach towards Youth	46
5.1 A New Perspective on Youth.....	47
5.2 The Socio-Political Contribution: Putting Beneficiaries First.....	49
5.3 The Economic Contribution: Incentives for Partnership	51
5.4 The Rights-Based Contribution: Advocacy and Awareness	52
5.5 Cooperation and Coordination	54
6 Outlook	56

7	Index of Sources	58
	List of Literature	58
	List of Background Interviews	69

List of Illustrations

	<i>Illustration A: Three Approaches towards Youth in War-to-Peace Transitions</i>	5
	<i>Illustration B: Roles of Youth in Post-Conflict Situations</i>	47
	<i>Illustration C: Holistic Approach towards Youth</i>	48

Executive summary

This study deals with youth in war-to-peace transitions and the response of international organizations to them. While youth's relevance for societal transformation is a long-acknowledged fact, their large numbers and potential roles in conflict have recently caused organizations to consider them a target group for peace and development programs. Reflecting on this process, this study thus assesses the difficulties in conceptualizing the role of youth in peace-building processes on the one hand and the concrete efforts of international organizations to integrate them into their policies and programs on the other. For this purpose, it explores four guiding questions: First, what approaches have international organizations developed regarding youth? Second, on which assumptions about youth and their role in violent conflicts are they based? Third, how do the different approaches affect program development, and, fourth, are they compatible?

One of the obstacles in targeting youth is finding a common definition for them. While the United Nations (UN) defines them as people between the ages of 15 and 24, youth are, in reality, a very heterogeneous group. According to this study, youth is a transitional state between childhood and adulthood and is highly dependent on the socio-cultural environment. The situation of violent armed conflict exacerbates the problems of finding a common definition because it forces children to assume adult roles and functions.

Indeed, a large and growing part of combatants in protracted armed conflicts are youth. Since there is no legal framework for this group, however, demobilization and reintegration programs have largely neglected them in practice. Neither small children nor mature adults, international organizations have been torn between a desire to protect them and allowing for their meaningful participation. In contrast to armed groups, which regularly offer youth an income, an occupation, status, identity and the 'excitement' of violence, most DRPs fail to appeal to older children and young adults. But the failure to (re)integrate youth into civil structures cannot only put the peace-building process at jeopardy but also deprives these war-affected societies of a potential driving force for peace and development.

In order to explain the various responses of international organizations towards youth in conflict contexts, specifically regarding demobilization and reintegration, this study developed three ideal typical approaches: (1) a rights-based approach, (2) an economic approach, and (3) a socio-political approach. The rights-based approach is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has so far confined the work of international organizations regarding youth under 18 years. The economic approach views youth as decision-makers in the marketplace, who respond to supply and demand in pursuit of their interests. The socio-political approach regards youth's self-perception and their relationship to civil society as

crucial for the peace-building process. After outlining their basic ideas on a theoretical level, this study examines two exemplary demobilization and reintegration programs for each approach to determine their practical value for post-conflict peace building.

Accordingly, each approach possesses distinct strengths and weaknesses which are ultimately derived from the different roles they assign to youth in peace and conflict. The strengths of the rights-based approach therefore lie in the preventive phase, the advocacy function and the strengthening of community responsibility. The economic approach, on the other hand, is most effective in the short-term because it can deliver immediate results to young beneficiaries and lure them away from armed forces. The socio-political approach fosters long-term reconciliation by countering the marginalization of young people through their integration into societal structures; it can best account for youth's gender-related identity because it is based on their participation. As a result of these different qualities, this study concludes that a holistic approach is needed in order for international organizations to profit from their distinct advantages.

All approaches should converge in their common objective to create an enabling environment for youth in post-conflict situations: by protecting them from forced recruitment, giving them a job perspective, furthering their personal development, and asking for their opinion and action. In fact, legal, economic, and socio-political dimensions are all necessary features of war-to-peace transitions. In order to make all three approaches compatible, the challenge is to adapt them to youth. Moreover, international organizations have to share a common perception of youth and to coordinate their policies and programs, putting youth's concerns before the organization's confined interests. By consolidating and systemizing experiences with youth in war-to-peace transitions, this study hopes to contribute to this endeavor.

Introduction

Adolescence shares many aspects with post-conflict situations; both are periods of transition marked by struggles, instability, hopes and fears. In contrast to children, who are covered under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the ‘in-between’ status of youth has been largely excluded from the agenda of international peace and development efforts. Most conflict-related data simply omit them, making analysis and targeted programming extremely difficult. Youth have entered public debate and discourse mainly as accomplices in crime, suicide bombers, soldiers, or simply rebels.¹

Illustration A: Three Approaches towards Youth in War-to-Peace Transitions

	Rights-Based Approach	Economic Approach	Socio-Political Approach
Optimal Period	Prevention	Short term	Long term
Objective	Human security	Stability ²	Reconciliation
Target Group	Children (less than 18 years of age)	Youth (15 to 24 years)	Flexible, responsive to self-perception and socio-cultural concept
Roles of Youth (Characteristics)	Victim (vulnerable, innocent) ↓ Social actor (adaptable, resilient)	Exploitable resource (aggressive, greedy) ↓ Economic actor (resourceful, rational)	Spoiler (frustrated, excluded) ↓ Peace builder (transformable, active)
Instruments	Legal norms and conventions	Economic policies on micro / macro level	Participatory approaches
Typical Programs (Selection)	Reintegration into families; human rights advocacy; psychosocial work; basic education	Socio-economic reintegration; vocational training; income-generating activities; catch-up education	Participatory surveys; support of youth activities, organizations and networks; peace education
Typical Actors (Selection)	Save the Children, UNICEF	ILO, World Bank	GTZ, SFCG, WCWRC, UNDP

¹ Adolescents also form a high-risk group for sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, to which many negative connotations are attached.

² Stability is defined here as the discontinuation of violence.

Emerging from this problem-based approach that characterizes them by their irresponsible and harmful behavior, several international organizations have recently discovered youth as a target group in peace building. The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC) has been one of the leading advocates for putting youth on the international agenda. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) are currently in the process of evaluating their youth programs in armed conflict. The World Bank (WB) has just opened an interactive Internet discussion on the organization's youth strategy. Despite these efforts, the lack of a framework and the scarcity of program evaluations, both of which are essential for assessing the particular concerns of youth, are daunting.

The following study thus aims to explore both the particular problems in conceptualizing the role of youth in peace-building processes and the responses of international organizations to this new target group. What approaches have international organizations developed towards youth? On which assumptions about youth and their role in violent armed conflicts are they based? How do the different approaches affect program development, and are they compatible? This study has identified three approaches for this purpose (see illustration A) that underscore programs for youth in post-conflict situations: (1) a rights-based approach based on the framework of the CRC, (2) an economic approach that views youth through the lens of monetary decision-making during war, and (3) a socio-political approach that examines youth vis-à-vis its relationship to civil society. Only the rights-based approach has explicitly appeared in organizations' policies and practice.

Although the three approaches overlap in some areas, this study posits that each approach possesses distinct characteristics that can negatively affect the practice of organizations, leading to inconsistencies, gaps, and inefficiencies in the international response towards youth. Conversely, the three approaches can also complement each other if organizations capitalized on the approaches' comparative advantages through their cooperation and coordination. The approaches should thus be understood as a somewhat idealized construct to explain phenomena of youth programs.

This study will employ the term 'youth', which includes adolescents and young adults as a distinct phase between childhood and adulthood. According to the UN World Youth Report, this includes persons from 15 to 24 years (World Youth Report 2003). Rather than limiting this notion to a certain age range, however, this study emphasizes the necessity to define the term according to the functional and socio-cultural context as explained in the first chapter. When appropriate, it employs Newman's distinction between 'child', 'adolescent', 'youth' and 'the 'young' or 'young people'. Accordingly, 'child' describes individuals who have not yet reached

puberty. 'Adolescents' refers to the transition from puberty to physiological maturity. 'Youth' includes older teens up to those in their early mid-twenties. 'The young' or 'young people' serves as a general category (2004: 3).

This study will focus on the demobilization³ and reintegration⁴ of ex-combatants⁵ in order to illustrate some practical implications of applying different approaches towards youth. The general distinction between child and adult combatants, which ultimately results from the legal status conferred to children, also highlights the problems in forcing youth into either of these categories. The findings of this study are accordingly based on program descriptions and/or evaluations of demobilization and reintegration programs (DRPs) for children and youth. As a result of the absence of 'youth' as a specific target group in most DRPs, this study will apply a broad definition of both youth and DRPs: DRPs for child soldiers will illustrate the rights-based approach, socio-economic reintegration, training and employment programs for youth at risk the economic approach, and participatory programs for war-affected youth the socio-political approach.

To collect opinions and information on the three approaches, nine semi-structured background phone or email interviews were conducted, including two 'representatives' of each approach. Geoffrey Oyat, program officer at Save the Children in Uganda, and Casey Kelso, International Coordinator at the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, were interviewed for information on the rights-based approach. Irma Specht, director of the consultancy firm Transition International and formerly responsible for the socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants at the International Labor Organization (ILO), and Maurizia Tovo, Senior Social Protection Specialist and Coordinator of the Orphans and Vulnerable Children at the World Bank were interviewed for information on the economic approach. Michael Shipler, Program Coordinator of the Youth and Children Programs at Search for Common Ground (SFCG), and Kai Leonhardt, Project Manager of the youth program in Kosovo at the German Development Cooperation Agency (GTZ), were interviewed for information on the socio-political approach. In order to acquire expertise in the fields of DRPs and child psychology, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with Colin Gleichmann, Program Manager at the GTZ and specializing in

³ Demobilization refers to the process of downsizing or disbanding armed forces (DPKO 1999: 15; GTZ / NODEFIC / SNDC / PPC. 2004)

⁴ Reintegration programs assist former combatants with the families', economic and social reintegration into civil society. This can include cash assistance, compensation in kind or training and income-generating measures (DPKO 1999: 15).

⁵ For simplification, this study does not differentiate between recruitment and demobilization by armies, paramilitary groups and civil-defence bodies although there may be considerable differences.

demobilization and reintegration programs, Vera Chrobok, Researcher at the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) with a focus on underage soldiers, Boia Efraime Junior, psychotherapist at the psychosocial rehabilitation project for former child soldiers in Mozambique, and Jo Boyden, Senior Research Officer at the Refugees Studies Centre at the University of Oxford with an expertise in children and youth living in extreme adversity. In addition to these hands-on insights, this study will utilize secondary literature to reflect the interdisciplinary dimension of this field of study.

1 Definitions and Concepts

1.1 Defining ‘Youth’

International organizations do not offer a common definition of youth, partly as a result of the multifaceted nature of this group. Each agency has therefore adopted a concept in line with their respective missions or mandates, mostly accompanied by an age range. The World Health Organization (WHO) distinguishes between three different categories: adolescents (10 – 19 years-old), youth (15 –24 years-old) and young people (10-24 years-old). Defining age chronologically reflects a research bias towards Western notions of ‘normal’ childhood, which are rooted in biomedical theory⁶ and assigns a development stage to a particular age range (Newman 2004: 8). In recent literature, however, child development is increasingly seen as “an active, social process” that is subject to “a process of negotiations between individuals, family members, peer groups and the wider community in the context of life events and rites of passage” (Mawson 2004: 226). As a result, the definition of ‘childhood’ or ‘adolescents’ must account for the functions of youth in a socio-cultural context, not just a particular age range (WCRWC 2000: 10f.).

A functional definition describes adolescence as a temporary stage in life between childhood and adulthood and subject to external circumstances. A visible physical maturation with the advent of puberty does therefore not automatically equate with a mental maturation towards adulthood (Wolman 1998: 5f.). The situation of war makes ‘growing-up’ a matter of surviving, often turning a child into the sole caretaker of his/her younger siblings or a relentless warrior. A child thus acquires a *de facto* status of adulthood.⁷ A child’s performance in the emergency can, however, conceal whether the child has adapted to the growing challenge of

⁶ There is a biomedical component to the adolescent stage because certain functions of the brain develop, especially the ability for abstract thinking (UNICEF 2002: 6f.).

⁷ This ability to cope with adverse situations is described as a child’s “resiliency”. In contrast, its susceptibility to suffer damage as a result denotes its “risk” (Boyden / Mann 2000: 5-7).

surviving or whether this is merely an ad-hoc coping mechanism followed by permanent psychological damage. The effect ultimately depends on the predisposition of the individual and the existence of protective factors, such as parents or peers (Wessels 1998; Boyden/Mann 2000: 4, 10). The socio-cultural environment can inform the understanding about children's resilience.

In fact, the cultural relativity of childhood, adolescence and adulthood calls for an adaptation of definitions according to socio-cultural context. There exist profound differences between developing and developed countries, which put universal definitions into perspective. One must recognize that industrialization and the extension of education have come along with the discovery of adolescence as a distinct life stage in many Western societies, which has not permeated every society to the same extent (Boyden Interview 2004).⁸ The duration a society affords youth for growing up and maturing also depends on political and economic conditions (Newman 2004: 10f.; Tefferi 2003). In North America and Europe, a chronological categorization of youth between 12 - 13 and 21 - 25 prevails with a focus on the individual rather than the community. In contrast, societies in Africa or the Middle East usually regard it rather as a development stage between childhood and adulthood, which is largely determined by the community and corresponds to their the young person's functions (Sommers 2001: 3f.; World Youth Report 2003). Adding to the complexity of finding a socio-cultural definition, globalization can alter intergenerational relations by imposing a "global" definition of adolescence on societies (World Youth Report 2003: 6).⁹

What happens, however, if the society that is meant to provide orientation is disintegrating? The dependency of adolescence on a protective socio-cultural frame of orientation puts them into an uneasy state of limbo in a crisis setting (Kübler 2002: 10). States may be unable or unwilling to offer education, social services or basic security that are preconditions for acquiring the economic and social status upon which adulthood is contingent. Many children and adolescents lose their family and community support and network because they are forced to migrate. The usual criteria for reaching adulthood, like financial independence, marriage,

⁸ Ms. Graça Machel, expert of the UN Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children, nevertheless, claims, "All cultures recognize adolescence as a highly significant period in which young people learn future roles and incorporate the values and norms of their societies" (2002: par. 170). This fact does not contest the necessity of adapting this definition to socio-cultural contexts.

⁹ The media and international trade has transferred a global image of "teenage" life associated with certain products and activities, e.g. listening to rock or pop music, having fun, or drinking alcohol. The inability to share in this (costly) lifestyle can prompt a feeling of injustice among young people in poor countries who feel cheated by a system that denies them access to what commercials depict as their identity (World Youth Report 2003: 6).

initiation rites, the right to vote, or full judicial liability, can become illusory in a crisis setting (McIntyre et al. 2002: 1). Although some adolescents thus perform some adult functions - like defending their country or earning their own income, political instability and poverty prevent them from reaching adulthood as defined by socio-cultural criteria. Some of them may thus “form regressive groupings, where preadolescent values such as being tough, arrogant, and mischievous prevail” (Wolman 1998: 51). This regression inadvertently feeds into negative stereotypes of adolescents in a given crisis. The situation of armed conflict therefore reaffirms the utility of socio-cultural and functional criteria in grasping the complexity of the ‘youth’ phenomenon.

Cynically, just as much as the vague notions of ‘youth’ have discouraged international organizations from targeting this group, government and rebel forces alike have found the expandable definition advantageous for their mobilization efforts. Throughout history, teenagers’ feelings of exclusion and drive for independence have been easily manipulated and exploited for military purposes. Further, there are strong political implications in defining childhood and youth: young activists call themselves children to avoid punishment while authorities call them ‘youth’ to make them legally culpable (Boyden/Mann 2000: 68). In the end, adolescent groups are likely to choose to join organizations whose understanding of youth offers them “immediate participation in decision-making processes of the adult society” (Wolman 1998: 50). Alas, militaries around the world regularly seem to hold this promise.

1.2 Demobilization and Reintegration in Post-Conflict Situations

With a ceasefire or a peace agreement, an intricate process of rebuilding war-torn societies sets in. Weak political and social structures, power competitions and insecurity make countries in transition prone to relapse into violent conflict, decreasing people’s trust in a viable peace. Rather than rebuilding the pre-war structures that catalyzed war, peace building requires forming a new structure out of existing components of civil society. War-to-peace transitions aim to achieve a secure environment, accountable political structures, economic and social revitalization, and promoting societal reconciliation (Ball 2001: 720-724). Recognizing the importance of all of these tasks, the challenge becomes “to incorporate the longer-term objective of strengthening economic and political governance into short-term rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts” (Ball 2001: 725).

The demobilization and reintegration of former combatants can become a visible and powerful sign of societal transformation. Its overall objective is the ‘conversion’ of ex-combatants into civilians, usually after a peace agreement. In this,

demobilization entails the more short-term process of separating combatants from military service or armed groups whereas reintegration focuses on the more long-term “social and economic inclusion of former combatants into their communities of origin or new communities” (IPA 2002: 2). The chance of their re-recruitment into fighting forces is significant though. A fragile state of peace can barely accommodate the excessive security demands of former combatants. At the same time, a weak economic system cannot satisfy their usually “unrealistic expectations” concerning jobs for people who are normally not even prepared for civilian life” (Ball 2001: 720). The traumas and vengeful mindsets that go along with being a combatant are psychologically damaging, making their reentry into regular society a complex and long-term endeavor. All the same, effective programs ultimately have to persuade ex-combatants that peace pays off, for both society as a whole and, more important, for them as individuals. Otherwise, ex-combatants can jeopardize a frail state of peace.

The key for successful DRPs lies in the integration of short- and long-term goals as part of the overall war-to-peace transition. While progressive disarmament and demobilization are supposed to provide a secure and stable environment initially, the sustainability of demobilization and reintegration ultimately depends on prospects of a more long-term social and economic development (IPA 2002: 5). Before singling out ex-combatants for added benefits, programs should thus always question whether the demobilization assistance promotes the ex-combatants’ long-term integration into the community. Reinsertion assistance could otherwise appear as a “reward” for previous violence and send the wrong signal to ex-combatants and their communities alike (IPA 2002, 4). So far, reintegration has only received minor funding and analysis compared to the better-understood military aspects of disarmament and demobilization. In many cases, up to ninety percent of the funding for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) goes to disarmament and demobilization so that there is often no money left for reintegration (Chrobok Interview 2004). Ms. Chrobok from BICC thus warns that, “The money is thrown out of the window if reintegration fails and former combatants are recruited again” (Interview 2004). The reason for the neglect of reintegration lies in the anticipated need for a long-term commitment, its dual nature in development and security, the lack of quantifiable results, and the regular omission of reintegration aspects in peacekeeping mandates (IPA 2002: 2).

The reintegration into communities can and should become a focus for responding to children and youth’s particular situation. Communities can help to cater for youth’s demand for life skills, education, and vocational training, endowing them with a sense of belonging. They can offer them alternative ways of making a living and earning respect in society other than military life. Moreover, letting

communities apply their own reintegration strategies is often necessary for child soldiers to become reaccepted by their families and communities; their integration also serves as a vital protection against their re-recruitment (Steudtner 2000). Most DRPs for underage or child soldiers¹⁰ therefore discharge and rapidly reinsert the children into their communities, preferably into their families if they can still be found (DPKO 1999: 87 - 90).¹¹ These programs regularly operate under adverse conditions: In many contexts, there is no formal demobilization and reintegration process for underage soldiers whatsoever because they are either not recognized or because the demobilization and reintegration process has not begun (Lorey 2001: 15; Verhey 2001: 6). Their demobilization and reintegration during ongoing conflict often demands nothing less than providing a 'safe space' for a group of the population with no territorial boundaries, and frequently at a time when a ceasefire has not yet been agreed upon.

Although underage soldiers have existed for centuries, the changing nature of war has increasingly encapsulated children and youth for three main reasons. First, fighting groups are increasingly neglecting the division between civilian and military targets, engaging in a 'total warfare'. Second, the proliferation of cheap, small, and easy-to-use weapons enables military units to recruit weak and inexperienced combatants. The most popular weapons, the AK-47 and the M-16, weigh little more than 3 kg each (Millard 2001: 193-195). For example, in Uganda, they only cost as much as a chicken (Machel 2002: 13 par. 27). Third, prolonged wars strip societies of their adult generation and require armies to resort to the younger generations as cheap, effective, and obedient fighters. Commanders describe these young soldiers as "easier to condition into fearless killing and unthinking obedience" (McIntyre/Weiss 2000: 16). Older children or young adults are even more useful for the military than younger children due to their greater physical strength and skills (WCRWC 2000). They are also easier to recruit because they lack social protection when they are out of school but not yet married (Newman 2004: 13). What is more, many feel a strong desire to be part of a group again and – without family commitments - are more willing to engage in risky behavior and the 'thrill' of fighting. During conflict, the breakdown of state and family structures, including homes, schools, health systems and religious institutions, removes an important

¹⁰ This study employs the widely-accepted definition of child soldiers in accordance with the Cape Town Principles, which were adopted on April 30, 1997. According to the document, "child soldier" refers to "any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity (...). It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms."

¹¹ The Lomé Agreement included provisions for dealing with children and youth for the first time and created the office for children's protector (McIntyre/Thusi 2003).

protection so that ‘childhood’ may seem an unattainable good in the midst of chaos (Machel 2002: 13; par. 24; Stohl et al. 2001: 193).¹²

Most definitions of childhood include persons under the age of 18 but voluntary recruitment is permitted for persons above the age of 15 in the CRC and above the age of 16 in the Optional Protocol.¹³ As a result, the legal system leaves room for interpretation concerning the recruitment of persons between the ages of 15 and 18 years. Whereas conscription, abduction, or any threats of force unquestionably constitute cases of forced recruitment, the criteria for voluntary recruitment and their verification are more contentious issues. Most of the young ex-combatants interviewed by Rachel Brett and Irma Specht in *Why Young Soldiers Choose to Fight* defined themselves as ‘volunteers’ although they did not meet the cumulative Optional Protocol safeguards that prohibit recruitment below the age of 18, including proof of age, parental consent, a “genuinely voluntary” recruitment, and full information on “the duties involved in such military services” (2004: 114f.). In many cases, “voluntary” recruitment just constitutes a “reasonable adaptive strategy or practical protection mechanism in situations of extreme danger or deprivation” (West 2004: 185). Most children and youth experts consequently denounce the division between voluntary and forced recruitment as set forth by the CRC and the Optional Protocol. The distinction furnishes the illusion that children have a choice in resisting the mobilization efforts and thus proves an arbitrary categorization given the lack of human security in these countries (West 2004: 185; Machel 2002: 16 par. 36, 38 – 43; Lorey 2001: 3, 17). In situations of protracted conflict, however, insecurity, poverty and violence become equally persuasive forces (Utas 2004: 343f; McCallin 1998).

Considering the complexity of causes leading to young people’s recruitment, the expectations for reintegration programs must be realistic. Maslen warns “not to confuse reintegration programmes with the reintegration process (...); a programme can promote a process but it cannot replace it” (1997: 8). With little life experience beyond war, the problems of violently divided societies exacerbate when applied to young people. These reintegration programs can rarely build on prior lives and have

¹² On a global level, ‘child soldiers’ have become an integral part of growing transnational networks of shadow economies in the analysis of Peter Lock, German professor of political science at the University of Kassel. A neo-liberal system has accordingly excluded the developing world from the regular economies, causing “social polarization within societies and between states and entire regions” (2002: n.pag.). Lock therefore stresses the links between globalization, loss of identity, and violence: “Force exerted through an automatic rifle becomes the means of resisting social exclusion” (Lock 2003: n.pag.; on youth and globalization cp. World Youth Report 2003, Chapter 11: 290 – 309 and Arvanitakis 2003).

¹³ Many states have made a legally binding declaration on ratification or accession to the Optional Protocol, specifying their minimum voluntary recruitment age as 16, 17, or 18 years.

to overcome influences and knowledge that young people gained at a significant time of their development. Youth have to re-learn normal cultural and moral values after having passed through a process of “asocialization” (Verhey 2001: 1). If successful, DRPs can contribute to the peace-building process by making the skills and knowledge of ex-combatants accessible to civilian life and by preventing former combatants from turning into ‘spoilers’. On the contrary, failure to complete the demobilization and reintegration process can jeopardize peace as ex-combatants may resort to violence as a familiar way of making a living.

2 A Rights-Based Approach

2.1 The Rights-Based Approach: Finding a Legal Framework for Youth

A rights-based approach has so far defined the work of international organizations regarding youth below the age of 18 years. The underlying normative idea of the rights-based approach assumes that children can claim certain individual rights even in adverse situations, transcending border and conflict lines. The moral obligation to protect them derives from a ubiquitous belief that children suffer the most; that they are innocent; and that their welfare lies in the interest of all. As a result, the approach ultimately aims to cover children’s basic human needs, thus providing them with human security¹⁴ (Bajpai 2000; UNDP 1994). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)¹⁵ of 1989 remains the most widely ratified UN document with 191 signatories and “the most comprehensive and specific protection for children” (Machel 1997: 59 par. 226). It replaced the former needs-based approach, which defined vulnerability criteria primarily in terms of health, involuntarily favoring younger children (Oyat Interview 2004). Through the CRC children emancipated the status as indirect holders of rights as part of their families and became “social actors” with their own set of rights (Millard 2001: 188).

The CRC draws a strict line between children and adults as defined by age. Article 1 affirms that children include “every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”. It puts the

¹⁴ In 1994 the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) introduced the concept of “human security” as an alternative to the realist security concept in the Human Development Report. Security thus covered seven basic human needs, which are economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security.

¹⁵ The World Youth Report 2003 calls the World Programme of Action for Youth “the key instrument of global youth policy” for 2000 and after. Although the United Nations General Assembly affirmed its commitment towards young people by adopting it in 1995, it refers back to the United Nations Charter as a “normative basis for youth policy”. It includes some guidelines for the development, monitoring and evaluation of national youth policies (2003: 7f.) Compared to the CRC, the Programme has received token attention however.

main responsibility for ensuring children's socio-political and economic rights on the state. Accordingly, states parties have to "take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation" (Art. 19 (1)). The explicit declaration of political will sets an international standard for which governments can be held accountable and indicates a clear course of action. The CRC has, indeed, caused a massive response by the donor community, not least because its legitimacy derives from the victimization of the most vulnerable of society, 'our' children. The ultimately protective system that targets governments clashes with children's actual exposure to violence and forces them into a category some of them have already 'outgrown'.

Images of children - as young as four - fighting for the Ugandan National Resistance Army in Kampala in 1986, however, challenged the assumption of children's passivity during war, inducing worries of raising "future barbarians" or killing machines" (Verhey 2001: 1). The notion prevailed, nonetheless, that children are not responsible for the wars they are fighting and stressed the importance of protecting them. The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, specifically Art. 8, considered the conscription, enlistment, or use of children below the age of 15 years in hostilities a war crime.¹⁶ The International Labor Organization (ILO) prohibited forced labor¹⁷ recruitment of children below the age of 18 years in June 1999, making it part of ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, the most widely ratified labor convention. As a result, not only governments but also employers were to be held accountable. Additionally, the UN adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in May 2000, raising the minimum age for conscription - as a form of forced recruitment - from 15 to 18 years.¹⁸ The Protocol has been signed by 115 countries and ratified by 66, among them the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka, Rwanda and Uganda, and has guided advocacy efforts (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2004). More

¹⁶ At the same time, there is a fierce debate about the culpability of underage persons (Brett 2002). Child protection agencies such as UNICEF were disinclined to try underage persons in the Special Court in Sierra Leone because it would undermine their protection efforts. Human rights organizations, on the other hand, wanted to hold them accountable and end impunity (Lorey 2001: 12).

¹⁷ Defined as "work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children" (Art. 3 (d)).

¹⁸ Those between the ages of 16 and 18 years can still join on a voluntary basis and only the government's armed forces. Many Western countries were responsive to advocacy efforts for raising the minimum age of recruitment as it matched their own plans to downsize their troops ('Kalashnikov Kids', *The Economist*, 8 July 1999).

recently, the Security Council Resolution 1460 announced ‘the era of application’ of the global ban on the use of children as soldiers in January 2003.

Despite public condemnation and the unambiguous illegality, the current size of 300,000 child soldiers in more than 60 countries has not decreased but is on the rise (Becker 2004; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2004).¹⁹ Human Rights Watch charges the international community for not taking more concrete countermeasures to punish perpetrators, such as cuts in military aid or sanctions (Becker 2004). The world’s failure to decrease child soldiers, however, has also cast doubts on the value of the CRC in practice. The military advantage and costs of foregoing these additional soldiers apparently outweigh benefits of better reputation and legitimacy under current conditions (Harvey 2000: 163). Child soldiers have become a “manifestation of [...the] dynamics of new wars” (Millard 2001: 187f.). Rather than preventing their recruitment, some child soldiers have thus merely been forced to conceal their age by their commanders as a result of the CRC (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2003: 5). In the end, the CRC contradicts itself by demanding from governments to demobilize and reintegrate their ‘own’ child soldiers (Art. 39), thereby accepting but denouncing the existence of such recruitment practices (Millard 2001).

The strength of the rights-based approach is also its weakness: rights cannot be compromised. Save the Children clearly states: “the release or demobilization of child soldiers should be based on humanitarian, not political, considerations” (McConnan/Uppard 2001: xix; UNICEF 2002: 36). Discounting the military rationale surely holds great promise for a holistic approach because it does not distinguish between girls and boys, non-combatant and combatant child, or younger and older children. Reality shows, however, that the legal instruments to protect ‘youth’ are ineffectual against the social, political and economic forces enticing them during war. The Optional Protocol does not address some of the root causes for the recruitment of children; economic or personal incentives for joining the army are ignored (McIntyre 2002). The ILO’s Convention 182 describes children as “non-participatory victims”. A “gray area of international law” (McIntyre 2002: 1) has accordingly left the task of constructing ‘youth’ to corrupt regimes and rebels.

The notion of meaningful participation as stipulated in Art. 12 (1) of the CRC, however, somewhat counterbalances the Convention’s static and passive image of children. Art. 12 (1) accordingly calls on state parties to “assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all

¹⁹ DRP for former child soldiers has occurred in six countries up to now, including Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda and new programs were planned in Afghanistan, Burundi, Liberia and Sri Lanka; the assistance benefits only a small number of children (Becker 2004).

matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child for the participation of children”. Young people should be able to voice their interests and act on their own behalf. The notion of meaningful participation hence guarantees equal opportunities for all children but also appreciates the individuality of each child, thus implicitly opening space for programs targeting older children.

2.2 The Approach in Practice

Most international organizations have pursued a rights-based approach since it promises support by governments through the CRC, moral legitimacy and a clearly defined framework. UNICEF has adopted a human rights approach to programming for women and children since 1998 (WCRWC 2000: 61f.); it is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly “to advocate for the protection of children’s rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential” in accordance with the CRC (UNICEF n.d., n.pag.).

Programs following the rights-based approach target children below the age of 18 years and largely circulate around the idea of protection. The normative framework does not distinguish between conflict and post-conflict situations, as children should not serve in the armed forces at any time. Referring to the CRC, it stresses advocacy on every level to raise awareness at the wrongness of child soldiering. The approach specifically appeals to the leaders’ conscience and their concern over their international and national reputation to release the children from their ranks and abstain from further recruitment. The rhetorical separation of children from their violent environment also translates into the demand for their immediate physical separation from adults during the demobilization and reintegration efforts. The legal framework has resulted in the inclusion of special provisions for child soldiers in recent peace agreements, and their recognition as a target group in DRPs (Secretary-General 2003).

Programs usually prioritize the reintegration of the children with their families and a return to a ‘proper’ childhood notwithstanding the young people’s experiences in the military. As a result, they would criticize any measures that benefit the individual apart from the community as vocational training or micro-credits. They sensitize the community to the involuntary nature of children’s participation in violence and raise awareness for their experience as combatants. This especially concerns awareness raising and support for girl child soldiers, who tend to be neglected in DRPs as non-combatant combatants but are regularly

ostracized by their communities as “bush wives” and concubines (McKay/Mazurana 2000).²⁰

The labeling and perception of children as vulnerable subjects can affect the response since a high degree of protection leaves little room for meaningful participation. The examples of DRPs of Save the Children and UNICEF in DRC and Sierra Leone illustrate important aspects of the rights-based approach by 1) the prioritization of family and community reunification; 2) the rigidity of the age range; 3) their strong desire for participation of children; and 4) the skepticism and inexperience with the economic integration of ex-combatants.

Save the Children: DRP for Former Child Soldiers in DRC

Save the Children headed the efforts in demobilizing and reintegrating former child soldiers in the North and South Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) between 1999 and 2002. The demobilization and reintegration of more than 1,200 child soldiers during this period indicated the possibility for child protection in spite of ongoing atrocities (Verhey 2003: 7). Rather than having to await a formal agreement with armed forces, the program occurred in a “quasi-official manner”, mainly depending on individual commanders, whom advocacy campaigns swayed into releasing their child recruits. In some cases, children had actively asked ICRC, Save the Children or other organizations or commanders for their own demobilization, or had simply fled from the army to seek demobilization assistance afterwards (Verhey 2003: 13f.). There was, however, little willingness on the part of politicians or commanders to find a compromise on DRPs for girls, who served in non-combatant functions in the house or as sexual servants; only five girls were demobilized although they were considered “amongst the most vulnerable and marginalized” (Verhey 2003: 12f.).

The program originally promoted a “holistic” approach towards reintegration rather than separating family reunification from socio-economic activities. Local NGO partners were responsible for “social outreach and mediation with vulnerable families and their children, non-formal education and literacy, and low-scale skills training [to raise] the income generation capacity of the children” (Verhey 2003: 7). The socio-economic component gradually lost in importance. Challenging the assumption that children’s resilience to recruitment depended on vocational skills training, Save the Children found “family livelihood (...) to provide more tangible impact” than socio-economic interventions (Verhey 2003: 7).

²⁰ Those few girls and young women who manage to leave armed forces are regularly forced into prostitution (Verhey 2003: 12f.). The discussion on ‘child soldiers’ largely focuses on ‘boys’, exposing a research gap on the situation of girls in conflict and post-conflict situations (McKay/Mazurana 2000). For a study on the specific issues of girls soldiers in conflict see Bennett 2002.

The organization consequently prioritized the prompt and smooth reunification with the family and community above all other aspects, most notably the child's individual training. The program limited itself to some recreational and skills activities as well as catch-up courses in transit centers (Verhey 2003: 24). Instead of feeling bound by the standard three-month minimal period in transit centers, for instance, Save the Children responded to the wishes of most children to reunify with their families and communities at the earliest possible moment. It consequently decided on a case-by-case basis on the children's length of stay at the transit centers. Critics of shortening this period for reorientation regarded this as a lost opportunity for providing child soldiers with additional vocational training. Save the Children countered that vocational objectives could be better achieved in a family and community setting (Verhey 2003: 38f.). Too many economic opportunities in transit centers would result in a dependency of children to the centers and in resentment in their home communities (Verhey 2003: 47). Save the Children had, for example, managed to end the communities' initial suspicion and hostility towards transit centers by starting joint recreational activities (Verhey 2003: 23).

An internal evaluation in 2000 substantiated this skepticism towards individual economic interventions. The evaluation concluded that small-scale vocational skills like "learning carpentry does not necessarily protect [a child] from re-recruitment" (Verhey 2003: 18). It would mainly benefit few and not even the most vulnerable children, primarily educated boys. Preferential treatment of at-risk children could even incite intercommunal conflicts, stigmatize child soldiers and indirectly give incentives for joining armed forces. In order to counteract an assumingly exclusivist approach for child soldiers, Save the Children reinforced the community-based approach by encouraging the creation of local 'Community Child Protection Networks' (CCPNs) (Verhey 2003: 18f., 63).

The CCPNs served as forums for all representative social sectors that would prevent and protect children from abuse through advocacy. Each community could determine its membership, criteria, roles and activities. Save the Children supported the networks by engaging in informal partnerships with them (Verhey 2003: 18f.). Although they initially proved to be more expensive than traditional program approaches, Save the Children also managed to gain greater awareness and foster engagement for child rights issues in the communities through them. The networks increased the legitimacy of child concerns with local authorities, initiated student child rights advocacy group and put pressure on the warring parties to agree to further official DRP for child soldiers (Verhey 2003: 18-21).

Despite the efforts for local ownership, many communities, however, fastened their expectations to Save the Children and its continued funding in the future. Moreover, there was not "enough genuine participation by children" (Verhey 2003:

22). Many children, in fact, demanded their own forums with links to adults apart from CCPNs (Verhey 2003: 20). Save the Children, nevertheless, saw their focus on family reunification rather than economic programs confirmed by the low rate of voluntary recruitment²¹; about 85% of continuing recruitment was by force and 10% by harassment or incitement. The evaluation report, however, does not indicate percentages of reasons for recruitment before the start of the program (Verhey 2003: 54). What is more, most of the re-recruitment of Save the Children's demobilized child soldiers occurred in areas where violent conflict had broken out again (Verhey 2003: 54). Considering the "fluid nature of armed groups" (Verhey 2003: 11) and the continual demand for manpower, the prospects for the sustainability of the program thus looked bleak.

UNICEF: Participation of Young People in DDR in Sierra Leone

The Lomé Peace Accord between the Government of Sierra Leone and the armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in July 1999 initiated the DDR process in Sierra Leone. It was the first one ever to account for the special needs of children in DDR and thus naturally engaged UNICEF, the lead agency for child protection in Sierra Leone. UNICEF collaborated with the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR), the Ministry of Social Welfare, and with local and international child protection agencies. Perceived as impartial by fighting forces, UNICEF played a role in the release of children from armed group.²² About 7,000 children, one tenth of all ex-combatants, had been demobilized at the end of the process in January 2002 (UNICEF 2004a). It also conducted specific programs for girls, who had been excluded in Sierra Leone's disarmament process, whether as combatants or "camp followers" in armed forces (UNICEF 2004a: 83).

As its "first and most urgent priority", UNICEF conducted family tracing for children and, in cooperation with the NCDDR, planned the reintegration by separating them from adult soldiers (UNICEF 2004a: 90). In the age verification process, it determined children's ages by interviews and assessment of physical development. UNICEF helped to transfer children to interim care centers (ICCs) and provided health-care services, psychosocial counseling, education and pre-

²¹ It is interesting to note that Save the Children distinguishes here between forced and voluntary recruitment even though UNICEF's field guide on 'child soldiers' denounces this division for reasons discussed in the first chapter (Lorey 2001: 3, 17). In order to evaluate the success of programs rather than basing legal categories on it, the notion of voluntary recruitment seems to be a useful concept.

²² Many of them had abstained from the DDR process to avoid stigmatization and the rejection of their communities. UNICEF thus provided specific program support for girls who had been abducted during the war, dividing them between those of 17 years of age or younger and young women between the ages of 18 and 25 (UNICEF 2004a: 83).

vocational training. The aim was to keep stays at ICCs short to allow for the children's prompt return to schools and communities because UNICEF considers education as "the most powerful force in the process of social reintegration" (UNICEF 2004a: 85). The National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR), with UNICEF and other partners consequently established the Community Education Investment Programme (CEIP) to allow war-affected children to visit schools without paying fees. Schools would instead receive in-kind support. The success of the program prompted a discussion on whether the educational program would continue on a national scale (UNICEF 2004a).

In early 2002, UNICEF also started to introduce more participatory elements to its Child Protection Network (CPN). While UNICEF developed guidelines for community-based reintegration together with the Government Ministry of Social Welfare and Child Protection Agencies, Children's Clubs emerged as part of the Community-Based Reintegration Programme. Locally organized and supported by the child protection agencies, children chose their own focus and activities in the clubs to help rebuild their communities' social services like the Child Welfare Committees. UNICEF also discovered that children's experience in armed forces could be "re-shaped" towards responsibility in their communities through peer-to-peer support programs (UNICEF 2004a). Participation thus constituted an evolution in programming from mere family reunification to children and youth 'self-help' activities.

In contrast to its psychosocial and educational programs, UNICEF's vocational program for older children, between the ages of 15 to 17, largely failed. UNICEF had offered to train them in a skill of their choice through an apprenticeship but had not conducted a labor market survey for the community beforehand. Without this information to guide young people's decisions, some of them had chosen an apprenticeship in auto mechanics, for example, although only few people in their communities owned vehicles. UNICEF concluded from this experience that children and members of the local economies should be more involved in designing pre-vocational training in the future (UNICEF 2004a).

The experience in Sierra Leone demonstrated that there are few opportunities for participation of children in the disarmament process in contrast to later reintegration for several reasons. First, organizers wanted to prevent an institutionalization of the ICCs as a result of the children's attachment to their teachers, peers and surroundings that could counteract their reintegration into their communities. Second, tight security provisions hardly lent themselves to participatory practices. Third, there seemed "a long-standing cultural resistance to children making decisions about their lives" (UNICEF 2004a: 83). It seemed, however, that participation would have eventually increased security because there

was “a lack of communication, and misinformation” (UNICEF 2004a: 83). Many young people were confused about the proceedings and their role in it. UNICEF, however, merely highlighted at the various opportunities for young people’s participation in the more long-term endeavor of reintegration and reconciliation (UNICEF 2004a).

2.3 Value of Approach for Post-Conflict Peace Building

The holistic notion of the rights-based approach suggests a multitude of activities for protecting children’s rights. The speedy and short-term process of demobilization and reintegration, however, forces organizations to narrow their broad agenda and reevaluate notions of vulnerability: Why would child soldiers receive special assistance despite their apparent ability to commit such appalling crimes and survive in the worst circumstances? The approach’s focus on young people’s victimization may obstruct the ability to view them as agents in war and peace. The demobilization and reintegration phase confronts the image of innocent children with the realities of brutal wars. Organizations have to walk a thin line between the utility of “children as victims” for advocacy and funding purposes and the danger of distancing themselves from the identity of their actual beneficiaries.

As can be inferred from the two program examples, the rights-based approach puts an emphasis on the role of families and communities in reintegrating child ex-combatants. This corresponds with the wishes of most children to return to their families. In addition, family reintegration also constitutes a safeguard against the misuse of development assistance since ex-combatants are not deemed the most trusted partners (Gleichmann Interview 2004). Whether families can live up to this task given their own hardships in post-conflict situations is one question. An even bigger one concerns the effect of the personal development and experiences of children through the war experience. Returning home amounts to an abrupt decline in influence and external recognition on the part of the former combatants. While the young people has freely disposed of their income in the armed forces, the supervision of money by social workers starting from transition centers to family life marks a personal step backward for many of them (Specht 1998: 63f.). In the case of Liberia, for example, children only received transitional life allowances through their families. Adolescents were considered ‘children’ in DRPs despite their prior experiences, and many resented that very classification. Lacking birth certificates and aware that especially foreigners would not be able to estimate their age, most youngsters merely chose the package of benefits they considered most opportune for them (Specht Interview 2004). The attachment to the old parent – child relationship often proves illusive and fails to make young ex-combatants stakeholders in a peaceful civilian life.

The rights-based approach has, for instance, not yet followed up on youth's interest in employment opportunities. UNICEF wants to give young people in conflict "positive alternatives" in order to stop "the cycles of violence" and turn them into "a source of strength for themselves, their families and their communities" (UNICEF 2004a: 5). Occupied with the desire for family reunification, many organizations following the rights-based approach do not regard employment of youth as a benchmark of successful programming. If these organizations do not consider economic programs part of their expertise and experience, other organizations will have to fill the gap, demanding a high degree of coordination. The strict age divisions, however, obstructs this process.

Considering that "chronological age is often not the determining issue in under-age recruitment" (McCallin n.d.: n.pag.), UNICEF's age verification process seems an inapt and inflexible method for their demobilization. It illustrates that the definition of childhood is either left to the implementing agencies and rarely to the communities, never accounting for the self-perception of youth.²³ A result of this legalistic approach is that those over 18-year-olds who had been recruited as children are treated as adults. But although they have the rights of an adult, they have not gone through some of the developments as most of their peers; they are often behind academically, incapable of earning a livelihood, and lack social skills. Their age does not inform international organizations about their level of maturity and their specific needs.

The lack of adolescents and youth as a legal category is also "a serious issue" for advocacy organizations like the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. "It is a major flaw of many DDR programs", Mr. Kenso, International Coordinator of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, confirms, "that former child soldiers become ineligible for further assistance once they reach the age of 18. Our definition of a 'child soldier', in terms of DDR, remains based on the 'Cape Town Principles'²⁴" (Interview 2004) UNHCR's Guidelines on Protection and Care of Refugee Children warns:

In advocating "children's rights" in societies where adolescents are performing adult roles of marriage, child-rearing, work or combat, for example, you should be prepared to explain why all persons under 18 should receive the special treatment given them under the CRC (UNHCR 1994: 7).

²³ Save the Children avoided the debate about age as a possible obstacle for the child soldier programs (Verhey 2003: 9). See McCallin n.d. for more on problems of age definition in DRP.

²⁴ See Footnote 13

Most child rights organizations are actually hard-pressed to justify their actions for child soldiers as a priority over dealing with more vulnerable and generally younger children in the community (Verhey 2003: 53; WCRWC 2000: 11). In order to reconcile conflicting interests of communities and organizations, rights-based organizations have been using child protection networks to integrate child protection activities into other support activities and to ensure the follow-up and sustainability of their interventions.

The task remains, however, to integrate youth organizations into these community forums; participation has become a benchmark for successful programming. The demand of children in DRC for their own forums indicates the significance of providing children with their own space. In turn, the success of UNICEF's Child Clubs indicates some of its possible rewards. These clubs should then be able to decide to remove the barrier to older youth and permit youth above the age of 18 years to join without financial repercussions. About 62% of re-recruitment in Sierra Leone affected those above the age of 18 years, mostly by forced recruitment. Beth Verhey, who evaluated the UNICEF program, argues that "for practical reasons, following up such cases is beyond the scope of child protection organizations" (2003: 55). In reality, however, it seems a logical extension of a preventive recruitment method.

In sum, the rights-based approach clings to the protection of children without accounting for the situation of a defragmenting state and society. The state of war, however, does not only affect a state's ability to provide human security but also changes the identity of youth and notions of 'childhood' in the society. Because of its inflexible character, the rights-based approach is thus most effective in preventing the recruitment of children and youth during peacetime and in the aftermath of conflicts. It can then raise awareness in societies and states for the needs and concerns of children and establish the legal and institutional framework to protect them from poverty and exploitation. Ultimately, the rights-based approach can enable children to turn into the social actors the CRC envisions.

3 An Economic Approach

3.1 The Economic Approach: Making the Case for Investing in Youth

The economic approach views youth as decision-makers on the marketplace; they respond to supply and demand in a "rational pursuit of interest" (Cohen 1995: 498). Military elites consider youth a valuable resource in the struggle for power. The armed forces' demand for manpower, energy, and audacity in fighting thus meets young people's need for earnings, an occupation, and recognition. In most developing countries, where wars usually occur, youth are left with few alternatives.

Just like rebel oppositions choose the “most vulnerable recruitment pools for the highest yield” (McIntyre/Weiss 2003: 6), youth may consider joining the army as their single best option. Some adolescents praised the good basic training in the arts of bush warfare in RUF camps in Sierra Leone (Richards 1996). Governments are thus challenged to “integrate youth populations” rather than considering them a threat to their policies (McIntyre/Weiss 2003: 9). As such, youth can serve as an indicator for overall function of the state of governance and the management of resources.

The “resource mobilization theorists”, who represent the economic approach, stress “objective” variables, such as organization, interests, resources, opportunities and strategies (Cohen 1995: 497). According to Paul Collier, the Director of the Research Group of the World Bank, “the true cause of much civil war is not the loud discourse of grievance, but the silent force of greed” (1997: 8). Elites can restrict profits to those participating in the action by using grievance to mobilize large numbers of people (Collier 1997: 5-7). The recruitment potential of youth thus derives from their suitability as followers, whose frustration can be easily exploited for the personal gains of their leaders. Young soldiers have thus turned out to be an important component in the organization of contemporary warfare. Rather than asking how war affects youth, the economic approach seeks to find out how the existence of youth affects war.²⁵

Indeed, there are about 1.1 billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24 in the world, the largest youth population ever to exist in history (World Youth Report 2003). The unemployment rate for young people lies at 14.4 percent compared to a global unemployment rate of 6.2 percent; and the share of youth unemployment to total unemployment is still increasing disproportionately. In the Middle East/North Africa region, young people even constitute 25.6 percent of the unemployed population and in Sub-Saharan Africa 21.0 percent (ILO 2004: 2, 9, 13). The State of the World Report 2003 sees the “youth hub” as a “demographic window”, which “can mobilize young people’s potential and launch an economic and social transformation“, given appropriate investments in health and education (UNFPA 2004: 5).

In contrast, some economists and demographers have pictured a grim world scenario for the future as a result of current demographic developments. So-called “youth bulges“, i.e. an excessive number of unemployed young people in a population increase the risk for political violence because of their easy recruitment into radical causes (Goldstone 2001; Cincotta/Engelman/Anastasion 2003; Heinsohn 2003). Proponents of the “youth bulge“ theory specify a share of 40

²⁵ For a case study that applies the economic approach to the case of Sierra Leone see Keen 2003.

percent of young adults (15 – 29 years) to the adult population (15 years and older) as the critical margin for volatility (Cincotta/Engelman/Anastasion 2003: 42-49).²⁶ The theory largely concentrates on young men because they are considered more prone to violence than women (Cincotta/Engelman/Anastasion: 44).²⁷

Then again, critics of the “youth bulge” theory draw a more complex picture of the relationship between a large number of youth and war, emphasizing the importance of environmental setting and policy response (Mesquida/Weiner 2001; Hendrixson 2003; Urdal 2002). Based on statistical analysis of armed conflicts since 1945, Steffen Kröhnert from the Berlin Institute for World Population and Global Development refutes claims of linear correlation between a high share of young people and war but emphasizes the multifaceted nature of conflicts. For example, those countries without wars have been economically strong, had low fertility rates, and thus a low “youth bulge” to begin with, indicating the significance of economic development as a factor for conflict analysis (Kröhnert 2003: 7-9, 11 f.).

On the whole, there is wide agreement on the relevance of “youth bulges” for conflict analysis because states’ inability to absorb so many newcomers into the labor market makes it easier to mobilize them for war. But there is still debate on the relative significance of other factors including unemployment, poverty, and the type of state authority. Furthermore, the “youth bulge” theorists are divided among themselves on the question whether young people’s violence is ultimately caused by greed or grievance, promotion prospects or inequality and poverty (Urdal 2004: 5-9; Heinsohn 2003: 17f.; Youssef 2003: 19). All of these are central questions any youth policy should be prepared to answer.

The discussion on the “youth bulge”, both its content and style, is also relevant insofar as it affects the image of youth and ultimately policies towards

²⁶ In Kosovo, Sri Lanka, or Sierra Leone, young people constituted a majority of the population in these countries that felt weak against formal decision-making processes but empowered when protesting or fighting on the streets (e.g. Hettige/Mayer 2002; Mertus 1999; Richards 1996).

Most of the young people rebelling live in cities of developing countries and have become entrenched in the rapid urbanization of the 20th century. Cities struggle to provide them with basic services. This study of Ruble et al. thus stresses the links between urbanization, youth, poverty, and conflict. (Ruble et al. 2003).

²⁷ Heinsohn attributes the gender differences to the frustration of younger sons who have neither income nor land since they come from more traditional societies where only the first-born inherits. They thus resort to criminal methods to prove their ‘male identity’ (2003). On a global level, Lock sees the violent behavior of young men in particular as a result of the changing gender roles in modern societies. Their male role receives a “radical devaluation” so that they substitute their “lost position in the production process (...) by participation in the social production of violence” (2002). Hendrixson disapproves of the “gender bias” in the „youth bulge“ theory, which would merely reiterate America’s domestic debate on the “teenage superpredator” in her opinion, that is young, black, urban men with its ensuing call for tougher legislation on juvenile offenders (Hendrixson 2003: 3; also Gluckman 2001).

them. In several speeches, U.S. national security experts have listed the “youth bulge” as a threat to America’s national security and put them into the context of the current war on terrorism (Hughes 1997; Huntington 1996; Zinni 2000). Moreover, the media has “popularized” a simplified version of the “youth bulge”, leading to the distortion of a scientific- and yet undeveloped- concept (Hendrixson 2003).²⁸ Youth would ultimately be regarded as prone to violence and subject of elites, a disempowering approach, which annihilates the work of those who have fought youth’s exclusion within societies. The additional attention this security dimension entails may be offset by the risk of neglecting the roots of their violent behavior (Argenti 2002: 145). Reducing young men to a resource inadvertently accepts this narrow view of those who exploit them and carries on myths of youth’s inherent violence (Tulchin/Varat/Hanley 2003: 5). The security debate on youth can, however, also have a positive effect by illuminating the relationship between security and the socio-economic dimension of youth’s role in conflict contexts (Hendrixson 2003: 2).

This study of Angela McIntyre and Taya Weiss from the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) offers one of the few “youth-centered perspectives” on a security issue by exploring the relationship between the demand for child soldiers and the supply of small arms (2003: 3, 5). While international trade increased the supply of small arms in African countries, there also needs to be a demand of recruits who will use them in combat or other criminal activities. Youth’s violent behavior is partly a reaction to the state’s neglect for their concerns, foremost in education and employment, and the consequential inequality and intergenerational conflicts on a societal level. Heightened levels of criminal activity circuitously weaken the governments’ ability to offer education and employment even more (McIntyre/Weiss 2003: 3f). Given the role of youth in small arms trade and the continuation of war, this study wants to reduce the demand for small arms by creating “safe spaces” for youth, meaning an increase of alternatives in employment and ‘diversion’ to what the military has to offer (McIntyre/Weiss 2003: 3-6).

In general, there is a lack of understanding for the crucial link between young people's illegal activities on the one hand and their unemployment on the other. Without employment, young people cannot contribute to their family’s welfare, which constitutes an important stage in their development towards adulthood in most countries. In reaction, some resort to “anti-social behavior”, e.g. drug

²⁸ Robert D. Kaplan’s widely read article “The Coming Anarchy” depicts young men in Western African cities as “loose molecules in a very unstable social fluid, a fluid that was clearly on the verge of igniting” (1994: 46). Hassan Fattah, Middle East specialist, was also quoted in the “Culture Briefs” section of the Washington Times “Youth bulges disrupt the social equilibrium, invariably inviting turmoil and drastic change” (Excerpt from Hassan Fattah 2002).

trafficking, crime, gang welfare, or the spread of HIV / AIDS through unsafe sex (World Youth Report 2003: 6). Others immigrate to countries with better education and employment possibilities and where their basic security is guaranteed, resulting in a loss of human resources, a so-called 'brain drain', in their country of origin (Fischer/Tumler 2000: 1).²⁹ Increasing the educational, training and job opportunities in their home countries would therefore simultaneously reduce the young people's propensity for both joining the army and emigrating.

Many international development organizations are currently in the process of finding methods to quantify both the profits when investing in youth and the costs when not investing in them.³⁰ Kosovo provides an impressive case study for the latter, which Mr. Leonhardt from the GTZ recently presented at the World Bank. At least 75 percent of the 50,000 rioting in Kosovo thus belonged to the target group of 15 to 24 years so that "German soldiers said that they would not shoot at children and youth". The costs for damage repair and stabilizing the country amounted to approximately 200 Million Euros according to Mr. Leonhardt's projections. The two days of rioting effectively cost one third of the Kosovo budget, i.e. more than the overall funds available for education and health in Kosovo. "And there I ask myself", Mr. Leonhardt concludes, "Do we have to calculate the effects of youth work if non-action is so expensive? For 200 million Euros we could have built and expanded all youth centers in Kosovo" (Interview 2004). In contrast to the widely held notion of youth as a potential risk, the economic case for investing in youth as an economic actor still has to be made.

3.2 The Approach in Practice

The World Bank and the ILO have largely devised their programming following the economic approach in accordance with their expertise and mission. The World Bank's Children and Youth Draft Strategy hence links youth violence to the high levels of unemployment and various forms of risky behaviors (LaCava/Lytle 2003: 2). The draft strategy refers to "youth demographic explosion in development countries" that "poses severe threats" for the generation but also for "countries as a whole" and asserts that "the reinforcement and perpetuation of increasing youth poverty and exclusion will be amplified by the size of the youth cohort" (LaCava and Lytle 2003: 4). In his annual speech for 2003, World Bank President James

²⁹ In Central Asia, the number of young people who get involved in radical Islam or engage in illegal activities is small compared to the large number of "the best and brightest" who are leaving the country because of a lack of economic opportunities (ICG 2003: 2).

³⁰ Organized youth stakeholders and advocacy networks have already detected a positive return on youth investment in industrialized countries (Sully: 2). But there are no comparable studies for developing countries.

Wolfensohn confirmed his resolve to support states in youth programming. For that purpose, the UN, the World Bank, the ILO and others founded the Youth Employment Network (YEN) in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (World Youth Report 2003: 66f.).³¹

This strategic focus has yet to show in the World Bank's portfolio nevertheless. The approved and active grants relating to youth in the World Bank's post-conflict unit from the fiscal year 1998 to the fiscal year 2005 amount to about US \$ 60 billion (World Bank 2003). It is not clear from the World Bank's statement, however, what percentage of the money directly benefits youth in contrast to other beneficiaries, the community, or the economy as a whole. Considering the lack of programs with youth as a direct target group, the question becomes whether there was merely a renaming of programming or a change of policy.³² The WB's concern for youth has certainly gained impetus with Mr. Wolfensohn's Presidency but has yet to feed into the actual program work of this large organization. Overall, international organizations still seem to be in the 'learning phase' of working with adolescents and young adults on economic issues.

Programs that pursue the economic approach normally target unemployed youth because of their potential risk to the peace processes. Rather than their belonging to a specific age group, their lack of socio-economic status qualifies them for programming. They provide them with economic incentives in order to thwart them from considering violence as a viable option for sustaining their livelihoods. Just like the rights-based approach seeks to persuade parties to release underage soldiers through moral persuasion and negotiation, the economic approach tries to change the 'value' of youth in war economies that so far render youth an easily exploitable resource. This ultimately forces youth to make a choice between working for war and working for a living. The following programs emphasize 1) the hard choices in allocating resources; 2) the justification of programs using youth's threat potential; and 3) the necessity to integrate economic measures in community structures.

³¹ Information at www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/cecp/yen.htm

³² There is a variety of programs that the post-conflict fund labels as relating to youth: DDR for ex-combatants, including child soldiers; the training of primary school teachers; the reintegration of at-risk youth through social services and vocational and professional training along with economic stimulation; employment-generation for women; and building leadership capacity for youth. The largest lump sum goes to the Kosovo Community Development Fund (US \$ 2.2 billion) where small scale projects are channeled through the community towards youth (World Bank 2003).

World Bank: Urban Youth Employment & Empowerment Project in Nigeria

The Urban Youth Employment and Empowerment Project (NUYEED) originated from a Strategic Conflict Assessment³³ that featured youth unemployment and the ensuing disillusionment as causal factors for war in Nigeria, particularly in urban areas. Youth are identified as “the driving force for nation building” in the proposal. In order to “channel their energies”, the program wants to employ a multi-sector lending operation to generate youth employment and skills acquisition on the one hand and empowerment on the other. Rather than a comprehensive and long-term strategy, it focuses on “areas where social stability is more fragile” and where the promise for “marginal gains in terms of youth employment and empowerment” is greatest. It thus responds to a request by the Nigerian government for short-term gains and is part of other initiatives to diversify the country’s economy that is largely based on oil (World Bank n.d.: n.pag.).

Aware of the complexity of factors contributing to disillusionment, these economic strategies would be bolstered by four components to empower youth. The first two components concern a federal youth policy reform and employment generation to create a framework for effective programming. The third component, skills acquisition and development, builds on the “entrepreneurial spirit” of many young Nigerians by featuring small-scale income-generating programs and basic vocational training. The fourth component, social capital generation and strengthening, would then account for psychosocial needs of youth, providing them with pedagogical and recreational activities in youth centers.

The project designers concede to three distinct risks, namely youth’s increased disillusionment, negative effects of limiting initiatives to some target areas, and the “duplication” of activities by other organizations. In order to mitigate these risks, the project recommends using sound marketing analysis to target vocational training. Moreover, it wants to ensure federal ownership and sustainability by making monitoring and evaluation part of the federal youth policy reform and by involving some key donors in programming and coordinating with the others. According to the draft proposal, there is still a need to acquire more information on how to sustain the program and how to implement it locally through decentralized mechanism (World Bank n.d., n.pag.). But the inability of the draft proposal to respond to these central questions indicates a lack of interaction with local stakeholders in the planning stage of designing the project.

The entire program does not ascribe communities a role in the process of empowering and integrating youth in Nigeria. Predictably, the allocation of funding resources gives a clear priority to macro-economic aspects of programming: The

³³ The “Strategic Conflict Assessment”. (2003). Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR). The Presidency, Abuja, March.

program allots the largest amount of money to employment generation (US \$ 35 million), followed by skills acquisition and development (US \$ 10 million), social capital generation and strengthening (US \$ 4 million), and the federal youth policy reform (US \$ 1 million). The harmonization of all four components is expected to further their “cross-fertilization” (World Bank n.d.: n.pag.). But the plan does not explain how federal employment generation would benefit youth or relate to other program components like youth centers. As a result, the laudable multi-sector approach thus fails to incorporate an intermediate level between youth’s individual empowerment through training on the one hand and state stability through economic programs on the other.

OTI: Youth Reintegration Training & Education for Peace Program in Sierra Leone

Initiated at the time of the 1999 Lomé Peace Accord, the OTI’s Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace Program (YRTEP) for Sierra Leone was conducted as a “nationwide, community-based, nonformal initiative for ex-combatants and war-affected young adults” (Hansen et al. 2002). An analysis of the conflict rendered disenfranchised youth as one of the root causes of the war and a destabilizing factor for the peace process. The YRTEP targets marginalized youth regardless of whether they fought in the war or are out-of-school for other reasons. It adopted a broad notion of youth following a socio-cultural definition because people in their 30s and 40s are considered youth in Sierra Leone as long as their fathers are still alive (Hansen et al. 2002: 22). From the outset, YRTEP struggled with several external obstacles: the recurrence of conflict that obstructed access of expatriate advisers, the unofficial demobilization of combatants and the reluctance of some combatants to identify themselves as ex-combatants out of fear and shame. The program still managed to reach more than 40,000 youth in two years (Hansen et al. 2002: 26-28, 31).³⁴

YRTEP consisted in the reintegration of youth into their communities, a praxis-oriented training in functional literacy for youth by-passed by schooling, and also included life-skills training, vocational counseling, and agricultural skills development, and civic education. Combining developmental and humanitarian aspects, it attempted to provide assistance instantly while giving some longer-term perspective through practical education (Hansen et al. 2002: 22f.). Management System international (MSI), an American consultancy firm, was responsible for all

³⁴ YRTEP complemented the other big nationwide reintegration program of the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR). Because of its informal character, YRTEP was able to compensate for some of NCDDR’s weaknesses, the delays in the beginning and its lack of an education program. It was the only program that addressed psychosocial aspects (Hansen et al. 2002: 25, 27).

technical aspects of education while World Vision, an NGO, focused on all community-related programming aspects (Hansen et al. 2002: 25f.).

In the end, MSI's Western concept of education proved incompatible with participants' need for immediate results. The curriculum included classes on self-awareness, life skills, environmental, basic health education, democracy and good governance, and conflict management. Six month to a year of training created expectations that the program was not able to live up to. Literacy and numeracy rates remained extremely low. More importantly, there were no follow-up programs in order for the graduates to utilize and profit from their skills because of the scarcity of micro-credit schemes or small grants in Sierra Leone³⁵; nor did YRTEP link its efforts to other developmental programming. Sustaining the program proved difficult because trainers and educational material the program required was too expensive.

This outcome demonstrated two major drawbacks of the prompt response: First, there was no pilot project that could have warned of some of these consequences. Second, WVI received no prior information on the program modules or philosophy from MSI so that there was no possibility to create an exchange of ideas on local implementation or ensuring local ownership through participating of the community (Hansen et al. 2002: 29-38). One could speculate whether programmers had left this important participatory element out because of time pressure. As a result, however, the program was too complicated, expensive and difficult to replicate for locals.

Overall, YRTEP had some success in bringing marginalized youth and the community closer together and hence contributed to local reconciliation. Youth found that they could better control their temper, understand cultural norms, and overall "function" in their communities after the training. The community members echoed their observations, noticing a reduction in youth's violent behavior and their new commitment to constructive activities (Hansen et al. 2002: 33). Some participants and local trainers even applied their conflict resolution skills in a local conflict, acting as "peace ambassadors" between local youth, the RUF and the local miners as well as the police in a neighboring town (Hansen et al. 2002: 34). There seemed to be a feeling of responsibility to act against violence. On the other hand, some participants complained about the lack of closure which one trainer later criticized, "You cannot sensitize people and then have them live in the streets" (Hansen et al. 2002: 33).

The YRTEPP demonstrates some of the problems that can emerge when mixing two approaches without reflecting on their comparative advantages. The long-term

³⁵ The program triggered some self-initiative community projects, e.g. community gardens, cobbler stands, sewing cooperatives and road maintenance (Hansen et al. 2002)

goals like reconciliation could have been better achieved through a socio-political approach that would have allowed WVI and locals to participate in program design. The short-term economic aspect suffered under the ‘distraction’ of peace education. OTI or other organizations could have built on the enthusiasm, level of cooperation, structure and skills of the communities involved by offering income-generating activities and small credit programs. But such opportunities were regrettably not sufficiently explored.

3.3 Value of Approach for Post-Conflict Peace Building

The charm of the economic approach lies in its potential to break down youth’s longing for self-esteem and inclusion into concrete measures with quantifiable results. Without the confinements of the CRC, its age limit and its focus on the most vulnerable, this approach has to define its own selection criteria. This can turn into a shaky balancing act between youth and other marginalized groups on the one hand and the individual beneficiary and their respective community on the other.

The allocation of resources can become a divider in communities if it is perceived as partial or unfair. OTI’s YRTEP has purposefully chosen a broad definition of youth that included on-the-street youth. Consequently, it did not face the same kind of criticism as the parallel-running NCDDR activities, which was restricted to ex-combatants (Hansen et al 2003: 28). The World Bank equally regards its focus of specific regions in the planned Nigeria project as a risk factor (World Bank n.d.). Marc Sommers, an expert on children in war, criticizes targeting economic programs for war-affected youth since it only reaches a small percentage of them, is expensive and does “not prepare youths for sustainable careers” (2003: 22).

On the other hand, an ILO research study in Liberia, Mozambique and Sierra Leone found vocational training, specifically the provision for basic education and training in life skills, to be an essential element in the reintegration of child and youth ex-combatants (Maslen 1997: 3). Many families would otherwise have to feed one additional person and, in the worst case, lose their only breadwinner. As a compromise, economic programming is increasingly orienting itself towards the community and family. A job promises youth ex-combatants an occupation and an income which can help them redefine their role in society.

In addition, international organizations have to justify the utility of DRPs since resources are scarce and ex-combatants “reintegrate (...) into the ‘poverty of the village’” (Maslen 1997: 28). The selection criteria for participants of DRPs thus frequently combine a profit-oriented perspective, i.e. those who promise the greatest benefit, with a security perspective, i.e. those who are considered

particularly at-risk of being recruited. Such a restrictive programming policy is a result of limited funds for reintegration but also of a realistic assessment of a tight labor market in post-war situations. The economic approach's pragmatism not only contrasts with the rights-based approach's attachment to principles but in many cases contradicts the perception of demobilized soldiers who claim a right to such training.

The biggest danger of economic programming resides in its potential to raise expectations for immediate results through training without accounting for the graduates' employment prospects. Although some factors cannot be directly influenced, the failure of programs to place their students is often the result of incompetence, the extreme time pressure of the demobilization and reintegration process, or a blind faith in the program. The lack of planning has been a recurrent problem in DRPs. OTI's or UNICEF's (see chapter 2.2.1.) programs prepared graduates for non-existing jobs and opportunities, leaving them better educated but more frustrated than before.³⁶ UNICEF's or ILO's investments in income-generating programs have so far not paid off since they had failed to adapt them to existing labor market. There was a perception among the demobilized that they had a right for training but they were often trained in "unmarketable skills". Without a job perspective, training became a "burden [rather] than a benefit to the society" because of unfulfilled expectations (Maslen 1997: 14).

These beginners' mistakes also indicate that there is, indeed, surprisingly little done for youth in this sector and many lessons still to be learned. According to the Women's Commission, adolescents are sometimes included in income-generation projects for adults but rarely do they form a majority. They have limited access to the few micro-credit projects that exist in post-war situations because the programs prefer older clients, who are deemed more reliable (WCRWC 2000: 21; Sommers 2003: 23). In contrast, the younger clients are deemed "a bad credit risk". (Morris n.d.: 9) Then again, an increasing number of organizations have recently started to become more interested in this field.³⁷ UNDP is just working on an internal survey since "recent discussions within UNDP New York (Headquarters) have revealed that [they] have in fact very little consolidated information about ways in which UNDP has addressed youth (ages 15-25) unemployment, whether directly or

³⁶ Likewise, IOM never conducted the labor market survey of local areas for reintegration in Mozambique's DDR for child soldiers. As a result, some of the demobilized soldiers trained to be electricians or car mechanics returned to communities without electricity or respectively cars (Maslen 1997, 13).

³⁷ The Action Plan 2004 for the demobilization and reintegration of children in Sri Lanka even sees the entire process endangered without an economic component: "Lack of funding to ILO and UNDP on Vocational Training and Income Generation activities raises concern for the overall successful implementation of the Action Plan" (UNICEF 2004b).

indirectly, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa". UNDP is thus looking at "programs that have specifically targeted youth either in the context of DDR or as part of general economic revitalization efforts, whether in rural or in urban settings" (Swamy 2004: n.pag.). At the moment, however, the employment rate of youth as a result of vocational training only plays a minor role in overall evaluations on DRPs for youth.

The economic approach is a missing piece in demobilization and reintegration programs for youth that respond to their "highly entrepreneurial need" and are appealing to them (Sommer 2003: 7f., 17; Kanopka 2001). In some cases, economic programs for youth merely try to compensate for the earlier neglect of child soldiers in peace negotiations (Maslen 1997: 3).³⁸ But the assistance given under the adult soldier programs is in Ms. Specht's view often unsuitable for youth:

The adult approach is mainly a livelihood approach. 'Livelihood' often means that you get a piece of animal and you basically can produce enough not to starve to death. This might be interesting for a man who heads a family and who has a wife and now has enough to feed his small children. [It is] not very appealing for a guy of 18 or 20, who knows that he will forever run after those two cows. No prospect of career, no prospect to grow out of this. There's no real challenge to it. (Interview 2004)

Likewise, the notion of childhood and the type of assistance provided to children is often not appropriate for older child soldiers of 16 or 17 years. Ms. Specht thus draws the harsh conclusion that the efforts are "failing on both ends" (Interview 2004). Programs should instead utilize what most people describe as typical characteristics of youth: their entrepreneurial spirit, their creativity, or their search for meaning. "There is a strong case for supporting a strictly economic rationale for investing in youth", The World Bank's Draft Strategic paper confirms (La Cava and Lytle 2004: 30) There should be an interest of any organization dealing with children to support training or income-generating programs since "investments in children will only be realized if they are followed up by investments in youth" (La Cava and Lytle 2004: 22).

All in all, the economic approach wants to contribute to national stability by reducing young people's threat potential. Its security perspective has a dangerous tendency to discount youth's ability to decide against war and highlight their 'value' as readily available resource. It thus fails to question the utility of stability - as a

³⁸ In Mozambique the thorny issue of "child soldiers" under the age of 15 had purposefully been excluded. Boia Efraime, Jr., describes child soldiers as the "victims of peace":

They have fought like the soldiers, they have shared the dangers, they had the feeling of being part of the army and they felt discriminated when it came to material advantages. Adults received pay, training, loans, and other assistance. In contrast, child soldiers did not profit from these measures (Interview 2004).

mere discontinuation of violent conflict - for achieving sustainable peace based on social justice and respect for human rights. The approach is thus most effective in the short-term because it can deliver immediate results to young beneficiaries and lure them away from armed forces. It can then serve as a point of departure for programs towards reconciliation and development. In the end, the economic approach can turn young people into economic actors who gradually realize that peace pays off, not only from a monetary point of view.

4 A Socio-Political Approach

4.1 The Socio-Political Approach: Youth - a Peace Constituency?

A socio-political approach regards youth's self-perception and their relationship to civil society as crucial for the peace-building process. Rather than defining youth according to norms or assessing their 'value' in war economies, this approach thus demands from international organizations to listen to youth's voices and support youth in implementing their ideas (Newman 2004; Boyden/Mann 2000: 10). Influenced by constructivist theory, it aims to rebuild war-torn societies through and by youth. Next to the legal and economic aspects, this approach represents the need for youth's socio-political involvement. It is the most recent and untested approach of the three presented here with rather vague theoretical foundations, partly as a result of the ill-defined concept of civil society itself. As a result, it largely describes youth's contribution to peace in terms of (untapped) potentials, contesting that societies have so far accounted for youth's perspectives and capabilities (Pieck 2000: 33). Organizations have, nevertheless, used it as a framework for programming as the only existing option to conceptualize 'youth' as an agent in the peace-building process.

Grasping the constructed nature of youth allows one to analyze inter-societal relations on a sub-state level. John Paul Lederach's renowned peace-building model can be used to assess the value of youth as a civil society actor in war-to-peace transition. Lederach finds civil conflicts to be more similar to communal than to international conflicts since human relations provide "the basis for both the conflict and its long-term solution" (Lederach 1997: 23, 26). His three-leveled peace-building triangle reveals the significance of integrating civil society into peace building.³⁹ Reconstruction efforts should support "peace constituencies" whose support for the

³⁹ The triangle divides members of a society according to their degree of power and influence from the top to the bottom. The peace process can accordingly profit from the strengths of each level but has to create the spaces that are crucial for utilizing their transformative potential (Ibid.: 21, 35, 37, 108, 111, 117).

peace process directly challenges the interest of “war constituencies” in continuing the violence (Lederach 1997; Ropers 1997: 29f.; Ropers 2002: 117 -124). Thania Paffenholz of the Swiss Peace Foundation defines “peace constituencies” as individuals or groups who have a “long-term interest in peaceful conflict management and are capable of exerting a certain influence on other groups“ in order “to make an active, socially relevant contribution towards the prevention and peaceful resolution of violent conflicts” (2002: 3). Can youth form a peace constituency following this definition?⁴⁰ The answer remains ambiguous.

The long-term interest in peace ultimately depends on youth’s ability to remove themselves from the destructive environment around them. Warfare might be the most brutal but also one of the most intense human experience of higher social status, comradeship and feelings of superiority which is usually appealing to underprivileged individuals (Efraime Jr. Interview). The psychologist Boia Efraime Junior doubts the chances for their full rehabilitation after having worked with child soldiers in Mozambique for years:

In some cases, it is not a trauma but rather a different kind of socialization process. These persons have just learned the values of war like ‘whoever kills stays alive’ and see them as normal. We lack a basis for our work. (Interview 2004)

The World Health Organization (WHO) warns that continual abuse of violence can ultimately create a “general culture of terror” in prolonged conflicts (2002: 25).

In order to overcome this cycle of violence, a new stream of literature⁴¹ - in line with the socio-political approach - is exploring ways and methods to “promote resilience” rather than “forces to protect from risk” (Boyden/Mann 2000: 18-20). Accordingly, children often bear the main responsibility in adverse situations and can even mature as a result of the experience as case studies in Northern Ireland indicate (Boyden/Mann 2000: 20; Cairns 1998: 191f). Rather than protect them as future assets, participatory and child-centered approaches would render them today’s actors. Asking youth themselves would thus not only reveal insights about their long-term interest in peace but also indicate their ability to concede to a life without violence. At the moment, their alleged innocence “remove[s them] from the conditions and ideologies that generate violence” (Newman 2004: 13). There are few

⁴⁰ Fischer and Tumler recognize youth’s “potential for societal innovation and reconciliation processes in in post-war regions” (transl. Fischer/Tumler 2000, Sept., 17). Rather than engaging in an extensive theoretical discussion on “peace constituencies”, they attest to its practical utility in Bosnia’s peace-building process, in which youth programs, organizations, and networks clearly have a role to play.

⁴¹ For reviews on new literature on child and youth psychology and programs see Newman 2004 and Hart et al. 2004.

empirical studies dealing with the motivation and experiences of young fighters. Questions of identity, perceptions, gender, or role in society form the basis for programs following the socio-political approach. The approach thus also gives insights into some of the root causes of the conflict.

The socio-political approach contends that youth's exclusion usually emulates the disintegration of civil society in these conflict-affected countries. Youth are a "seismograph" for the state of a society as a whole (Rudolph 2000: 1, 4).⁴² "Masses of alienated youth in Africa's cities call the idea of 'civil society' into question" (Youssef 2003: 33) and testify to the lack of representation even in urban areas where they represent the majority. As a result, civil society has mainly been defined by adults rather than by an "inter-generational learning" process up to now (Rudolph 2000: 5).⁴³ If the economic approach depicts the "youth bulge" as a threat to stability, the socio-political approach renders the exclusion of a large share of the population as an obstacle for democratization and reconciliation.⁴⁴ As an integral part of civil society, they can enforce "a renegotiation of the social contract" and thus become a cornerstone for societal transformation (Tulchin/Varat 2003: 2). There is an inherent assumption in the socio-political argument that youth can and will transfer their war capacities for peace promotion in the reconstruction phase if provided with the opportunities. This idealized view of youth bears the risk, however, of blending out their negative potential. In the end, the desire to challenge authority and seek independence is, however, typical of adolescence and, as some claim, "can be instrumentalized for any number of ends" (McIntyre and Weiss 2002: 8).

In conclusion, youth should be considered and supported as peace constituencies because they can both promote peace but also endanger it. Their predisposition, which partly reflects their integration into society, would, however, call for different policy and program responses. Since unemployed youth, street children or ex-combatants are "(potentially) interested in war" and latent spoilers, they would accordingly require indirect promotion by preventing them from engaging in violence (Paffenholz 2002: 18f). Quite the opposite, if youth are organized in clubs or groups, they should be directly supported in a way that builds their capacities for crisis prevention (Paffenholz 2002). Their level of organization

⁴² Hans-Heiner Rudolph, who heads GTZ's youth programming, claims that the treatment of youth in one's own and partner countries mirrors the state of one's own society (2000: 4).

⁴³ On a global level, one may argue that the international community indirectly supports the continuation of "gerontocracies", which suppress young people in their "'traditional' social frameworks" and expose them to manipulation and exploitation (McIntyre/Weiss 2003).

⁴⁴ Scholars and international organizations have paid surprisingly little attention so far to exploring what democratization means in countries where young people up to the age of 25 years form a majority of the population.

and structure along with a willingness to interact with other members of civil society would accordingly qualify them as partners for cooperation. In most post-conflict societies, the conditions for youth organizations have to be created first so that youth can turn from latent spoilers to peace builders. In the end, the socio-political approach has to leave young people the benefit of the doubt to some extent so that they can prove themselves to be viable actors in decision-making processes.

4.2 The Approach in Practice

The GTZ, SFCG, the UNDP and the WCRWC mainly follow the socio-political approach. These organizations are some of the vanguards of a movement led by some anthropologists, sociologists and practitioners to target youth because of their potential rather than because of legal norms. In most development organizations there is no strategy for youth whatsoever, partly because of the dominance of the rights-based approach with its focus on children; they include them through programs on women, families, and communities instead. The objectives of the organizations following the socio-political approach are more far-reaching.

SFCG thus wants to “transform [youth’s] role in conflict” and post-conflict situations. As a result, they “try to engage them, reach out to them, support them to have constructive, positive impact so they can be peace builders”, says Mr. Shipler, SFCG’s coordinator for children and youth programs (Interview 2004). Programs should create opportunities for youth to do something rather than just “talk, talk, talk”. Mr. Shipler asserts his fascination that “youth can organize themselves in the absence of somebody organizing them (Interview 2004). The GTZ has also started to implement a long-term pilot-project on youth (10 – 24 years) in developing countries in 1999. Its aim is to develop approaches to promote children and youth and their societal integration by utilizing their (self-) help potential and strengthening their national and international networks. The ‘youth topic’ should become an integral part of all development cooperation planning (GTZ 2004).

Programs following the socio-political approach use ‘youth’ as the basis of their work, appreciating their various gender-oriented coping strategies and their increased maturity. Every step is consequently the result of an interactive process with youth to utilize their potential and to make the process itself a fruitful experience for them. Since a positive (self-) image of youth is considered a precondition for their integration into society, programs further the empowerment of the young as individuals and as organized groups as well as their connection to other community members and their integration into networks on local, national, regional and possibly international levels. The approach’s ambitious objective in changing human relationships for and with youth calls for long-term strategies. The following examples of programs demonstrate 1) the prioritization of youth’s identity

and self-perception; 2) youth's active involvement in every aspect of programming; 3) the expansion of the program through networks or the media; and 4) the impact of youth programs on changing people's perceptions of marginalized groups like youth, other ethnic groups, or former soldiers.

UNDP: Youth Post-Conflict Participation Project in Kosovo

The Youth Post-Conflict Participation Project (YPCPP)'s aim was to promote Kosovo's young population "as constructive community actors" (UNDP n.d., n.pag.). Kosovo has the youngest population in Europe with about 60 percent under the age of 25, whose marginalization - it was feared- could develop into a "unique potential for volatility and social disruption" (UNDP n.d.: n.pag.). The program thus considered them to be strategically important for development and peace building in the region. With over 20,000 young people active in 280 civil society and participatory organizations there was also a solid basis for the program in Kosovo. Building on these spontaneous or institutionalized youth organizations, YPCPP wanted to integrate them into a more comprehensive and inclusive process. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) implemented the program, which ran from December 2000 to December 2001 (UNDP n.d.; IRC/UNDP 2001a).

The program set itself four direct objectives: 1) the interaction amongst youth themselves, 2) the interaction between youth and governing structures, 3) the participation of youth in human rights, governance, sustainable development, and peace building, and 4) the development of forums for their integration into Kosovo's reconstruction process. YPCPP divided into three aspects. At the outset, it would enable youth to do research, select, and start development projects at the regional level. Next, it would support youth in organizing in a consultative Kosovo Youth Congress. Finally, youth would establish a Representative Youth Body comprised of youth to advice and advocate on their behalf. In the end, YPCPP envisioned a self-sustainable and youth-led network of Regional Working Groups and a Representative Youth Body (UNDP n.d.; IRC/UNDP. 2001a).

The selection of youth groups was crucial for ensuring the legitimacy of the process from the beginning. In its selection of partnering youth groups, YPCPP tried to make the program representative of youth groups across the five selected regions⁴⁵ and favored those groups with little or no support from other international organizations. In the end, it selected 15-20 groups in each region with one member of each group participating in the Regional Working Group (RWG) twice a month. The program allowed for regional variations; in the divided cities of Mitrovicë / Kosovska Mitrovica and Prishtinë / Priština, an Albanian and a Serbian RWG were set up (IRC / UNDP 2001a). Youth surveys supplied crucial information about the beneficiaries

⁴⁵ Pejë/Peć, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Mitrovicë / Kosovska Mitrovica, Prishtinë / Priština, and Prizren

and ensured ownership of the program. As a result of YPCPP's training initiatives, members of the youth groups were able to conduct the surveys for 2000 persons themselves. In order to counterbalance the low participation rates of girls, each youth group was encouraged to have one female member on the RWG (IRC / UNDP 2001a).⁴⁶

Throughout the project, the total number of groups in the RWGs decreased while those remaining developed an increasing level of enthusiasm and self-initiative. In the initial phase, program's activities had been obstructed by the security situation because of travel restrictions to minority areas. Later on, it merely struggled with youth's diversions during summer vacation (IRC/UNDP 2001b). The office in Mitrovicë / Kosovska Mitrovica, nonetheless, started to hold meetings independent of the IRC, and the one in Prishtinë / Priština even turned 'entrepreneurial' with their own logo, ID cards and a small office. The pilot subprojects focused on four main topics: peace initiatives, drug prevention, job training, and sports.⁴⁷ They promoted youth's creativity and incorporated some 'fun aspects' as well, such as peace concerts, jingles on radio stations, or a football tournament (IRC/UNDP 2001b). Moreover, the YPCPP conducted election training for the election of the Representative Youth Body for the young people, who had "very little concept of democratic procedures" (IRC/UNDP 2001b: 9).

YPCPP received a lot of media attention, raising expectations of donors and recipients alike. The right-wing newspaper "Epoka e Re" even published an interview with the YPCPP manager of the Youth Congress that acknowledged Albanian-Serbian cooperation for the first time after the war (IRC/UNDP 2001b: 10). Staff warned not to overestimate "the capacities of youth groups", nevertheless, because they were not yet ready to do activities by themselves and largely depended on the chairperson heading the RWG meetings and YPCPP staff attendance. Furthermore, since many young people in the region engaged in the activities of the YPCPP for the first time, it would probably still take some time and external expertise "to build up their confidence and overcome the prejudice of adults" (IRC/UNDP 2001b: 11).

SFCG's Youth Projects in Burundi and Sierra Leone

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) has started 'youth projects' in Burundi in 1999 and in Sierra Leone in mid-2000, concentrating on groups that are at risk to

⁴⁶ In the January- March report 2004, female youth made up 26 % of the RWG meeting; this number had increased to 38 % by the time of the next quarterly report (IRC/UNDP 2001a; IRC/UNDP 2001b)

⁴⁷ The costs ranged from 750 Euro for a sport program to 7,000 Euro for a drug advocacy program. They also varied in their number of beneficiaries. Employment training modules usually reached less than 50 beneficiaries while advocacy or sport events might reach 5,000 directly and 50,000 indirectly (IRC/UNDP 2001b: 9).

engaging in violence like ex-combatants or street children. Through recreational activities on the one side and conflict resolution trainings on the other, the idea was to give youth with different ethnic and geographical backgrounds an opportunity to get to know each other away from their conflict-stricken environment. The ‘youth programs’ are multifaceted, following up on different initiatives, particularly sports and culture activities, media outreach, and election monitoring (SFCG/ECFCG 2002; SFCG in Burundi n.d.).

As part of SFCG’s program in Burundi, youth in Bujumbura and Ngozi have thus participated in the first tournament in an ethnically divided district. They have been meeting ever since for one weekend every four months. Through this interaction, they are supposed to change perceptions of the ‘others’ and realize the impact of political manipulations. But the program also wants to raise awareness in the community for the concerns of youth. The organization has received a lot of recognition for a cartoon book that was the result of the cooperation with JAMAA, a local youth organization. “Le Meilleur Choix” (“The Best Choice”), tells the real-life story of the reconciliation process of two young ex-combatants. A movie version was broadcast on Burundian national television in August 2002 (SFCG n.d.).

In addition, SFCG discovered radio and other media as an important medium for giving marginalized groups like youth a voice. Steven Swanky, a young former RUF soldier, initially had the idea of a radio show by kids for kids in Sierra Leone. Partnering with child protection agencies in their districts, he worked with a group of street and ex-combatant youth on the project. SFCG’s radio station, Studio Ijambo now features child and youth next to adult programs. The program now distributes to mainstream stations (SFCG/ ECFCG 2004).⁴⁸ The program includes news for children, a radio soap opera for ex-combatants and their communities, news and information. In an independent survey of January 2002, its listenership lay at about 85 %; many of them are adults. Mr. Shipler, SFCG’s program coordinator, explains: “Kids are able to address issues and pack issues in ways that adults maybe cannot” (Interview 2004). About 98% of the listeners stated that the program changed their view of the role of children in Sierra Leone (Interview Shipler 2004). Following the Sierra Leonean model, similar radio programs have also been established in Burundi, Liberia and in Eastern Congo and, most recently, in Angola (SFCG/ECFCG 2004).

An important new aspect of this media outreach is its connection to elections. Together with the Independent Radio Network (IRN), SFCG mobilized a network of youth monitors between the ages of 16 and 35 years as part of a coalition for

⁴⁸ The Talking Drum Studio in Sierra Leone already produces 12 radio programming strands for 15 local and international radio stations for a total of 73.5 hours of airtime per week (SFCG/ ECFCG 2004).

domestic voter monitoring for the first Presidential and Parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone after the end of the civil war in 2002. Besides monitoring, the monitors actively helped with voter education, reported incidence of violence and ensured that marginalized persons were able to register. In addition, the network also is planning to engage in advocacy in Sierra Leone like the consultative process of the upcoming poverty reduction strategy for example (Center for Common Ground in Sierra Leone n.d.a).

SFCG's sees this political engagement of youth as a counterforce to their political manipulation. SFCG thus mobilized 32 youth leaders from JAMAA's Gardons Contact project to assist the World Food Program in food distribution when the country entered a state of crisis in February 2001. On a small scale, the young people countered the panic with a "unified and well-behaved model to youth". (SFCG/ECFCG 2004: n.pag.). Such projects can send a powerful message that challenge the victim- perpetrator dichotomy by introducing youth as capable in overcoming violence and hate on their own initiative.

4.3 Value of Approach for Post-Conflict Peace Building

The socio-political approach holds great promise for youth in post-conflict peace building since it envisions them as actors. Their transitional state is regarded as valuable for initiating change at the grassroots level, which can, in turn, affect peace processes on higher levels. As a result, it is – just like the rights-based approach – inclusive discounting their economic or security-related 'value'. On the whole, this perspective offers a way to grasp youth as an agent rather than limiting them to their role as victims defined by their age or the political and economic forces surrounding them. There is an increasing willingness on the part of international organizations to place 'youth' in the political sphere, acknowledging their effect and influence on crisis prevention, democratization, human rights and good governance (GTZ 2004).

The socio-political approach offers a youth-centered perspective, which is rare in practice. UNDP's and SFCG's successes resulted from the trust in youth's initiative. Consequently, the program objectives had been rather abstract, mainly relying on the value of participatory process and youth's ability to utilize the space given to them. YPCPP's basic aim was to empower youth and promote their interaction among themselves and within the community. Beyond that, there was little intervention in the rules, activities and decisions. The programmers guided participants instead of directing them, thereby prompting a sense of ownership among the beneficiaries.

The approach's participatory methods can generate changes in four realms: personal, familial, communal and institutional with extensive cross-fertilization

effects (Hart et al. 2004: 17- 27). The trust in them helps youth overcome their lack of self-esteem. In UNDP's and SFCG's programs, they gained diverse social and technical skills, including in communication, group dynamics, leadership, fundraising, accounting, advocacy, writing, and public speaking. Discussing the rules of procedure, electing representatives or informing others raised their understanding and belief in democratic processes and ultimately helps them prepare to become responsible citizens. Beyond the immediate personal impact, they served as role models for their peers and inspiration for their communities. These four realms of change appear in all cultures of the world even if the relevance of each realm might vary (Reddy and Ratna 2002: 6, 17- 27) so that it can serve as a cross-cultural matrix for assessing impact.

The leadership of youth, however, essentially assigns persons and organizations working with youth more reactive roles as facilitators, sponsors, advocates, or mediators. Taking on such different roles demands a radical shift in perception on the relationship between youth and society for all actors involved, including sponsoring and receiving countries, organizations, and youth themselves. Engaging youth in peace building would consequently require a "conceptual leap" because of the "emotive" and "paternalistic" lens that is typical of the response of international organizations towards young people (McIntyre/Weiss 2002: 5f.). Without a doubt, programs need to take account of young people's individual wishes, capacities and circumstances lest to overburden them. Without an economic component, for example, programs would eventually exclude the poorest or encourage adults to exploit youth as cheap workers for community projects.

Many international organizations seem, however, more reluctant to follow a socio-political approach because of the inherent risks involved in youth's political mobilization. Young people can spawn instability and endanger their lives if they dispute their leaders, whether in their communities or on higher levels. While youth's empowerment would mean more 'child-friendly' policies in liberal democracies, one can imagine the impact to be more fundamental in other more restrictive political systems, which are characteristic for war-torn countries (Hart et al. 2004: 31). It is doubtful whether either governments or most international organizations and NGOs would support children and youth in demanding more fundamental changes to their societies.

A "political dimension of participation" is therefore lacking in most adolescent programs in conflict situations (UNICEF 2004a: 5); organizations usually prefer to concentrate on service provision instead (Hart 2002). The efforts of local groups in El Salvador to oppose children's involvement in the conflict only received support in their last year of activity (Verhey 2001: 3). This protective view underestimates the danger, on the other hand, of suppressing youth's activism during a time when their

political awareness is heightened. Marie Smyth, researcher at the U.S. Institute for Peace, maintains that the role of youth combatants has so far been neglected in peace settlements based on the false assumption that leaders represent their interests or can control the youngsters. Neglecting youth can put the entire peace process at jeopardy, though, as could be observed in Northern Ireland, Palestine or South Africa (Smyth 2003).⁴⁹ Lest to put youth at jeopardy without silencing their political voice, participatory programs could offer a preventive mechanism for identifying risks at an early stage because of its continual open contact with beneficiaries.

Allowing for self-initiatives and meaningful participation bears the risk of losing control over the process but there is also a chance that impact exceeds expectations. In Mr. Shipler's view, the most innovative ideas and effective work usually stems from youth organizations like the Global Youth Action Network and the United Network of Youth Peacebuilders (Interview 2004). Furthermore, participatory programs produce information on youth by youth, which is urgently needed in any kind of programming work. Many organizations followed up on the WCRWC's extensive participatory research studies on the situation of adolescents and youth in war and post-war situations in Kosovo, Northern Uganda, and Sierra Leone (WCRWC 2001a; WCRWC 2001b; WCRWC 2002). Some donors, however, complain that this kind of work is too process-oriented and not about hard transformation like rebuilding schools or family tracing (Interview Shipler 2004). The question becomes who identifies indicators, and what are the criteria for success.

Diverging from a "top-down approach" would render everything "subject to re-negotiation", from timeframe to mode of implementation, and thus prolong and complicate the process (Hart et al. 2004: 37). External evaluators would merely provide their expertise for the evaluation or mediate between participants and supporting agency. As such, the socio-political approach breaks with the "normative" programming – including the CRC- that is oriented towards the values of agencies and donors. It calls for "evidence-based" and more accountable programs instead (Hart et al. 2004: 37). Creating indicators and project objectives that are meaningful to participators would alter (power) relationships between beneficiaries, implementing agencies and donors (Hart et al. 2004: 15). These changes at the organizational level appear to be a precondition for generating the changes in intergenerational relations in the war-affected societies.

The socio-political approach thus requires a long-term perspective from international organizations because its final goal is to change social relationships (WCRWC 2000: 37). Despite youth's motivation and high activity, both SFCG and

⁴⁹ USAID's OTI would consequently not have been able to support the student-led resistance (Serbian: '*Otpor*') movement, which initiated a non-violent revolution Serbia (USIP 2001).

UNDP recognized the need for ongoing support and supervision, including employment of sufficient staff, ongoing training for facilitators and participants, material resources and travel. But this long-term vision regularly conflicts with the short time horizons of decision-makers in the immediate aftermath of war. In that respect, many of the issues and concerns of this approach correspond to the larger debate on integrating short-term emergency response, peace building and development work.

On the whole, the socio-political approach fosters reconciliation by countering the marginalizing of young people through their integration into societal structures like youth clubs or networks. Their involvement in the decision-making processes can, however, inspire and intensify dissatisfaction with their leadership, leading to calls or actions for immediate reforms. Instability or armed conflict would be the result. Moreover, some young people may feel overwhelmed individually if organizations transfer power and resources to them; a legal and institutional framework should provide them with the protection they demand. Overall, the socio-political approach is most effective in the long run where it eventually holds the promise to ‘remake societies’. Combined with the economic approach, the approach basically defines youth's socio-economic identity in war-to-peace transitions.

5 Towards a Holistic Approach towards Youth

In order to explicate the different approaches towards youth, this study intentionally simplified the response of international organizations and thereby suggested a greater degree of coherence than exists in reality. Paul Sully, who is part of an American consortium of youth development organizations, sees efforts towards youth, nevertheless, in their initial stages, “The development community increasingly recognizes that something must be done. In part because of the newness of this attention at the global level, many people are not quite sure just what that ‘something’ should be” (n.d.: 2).

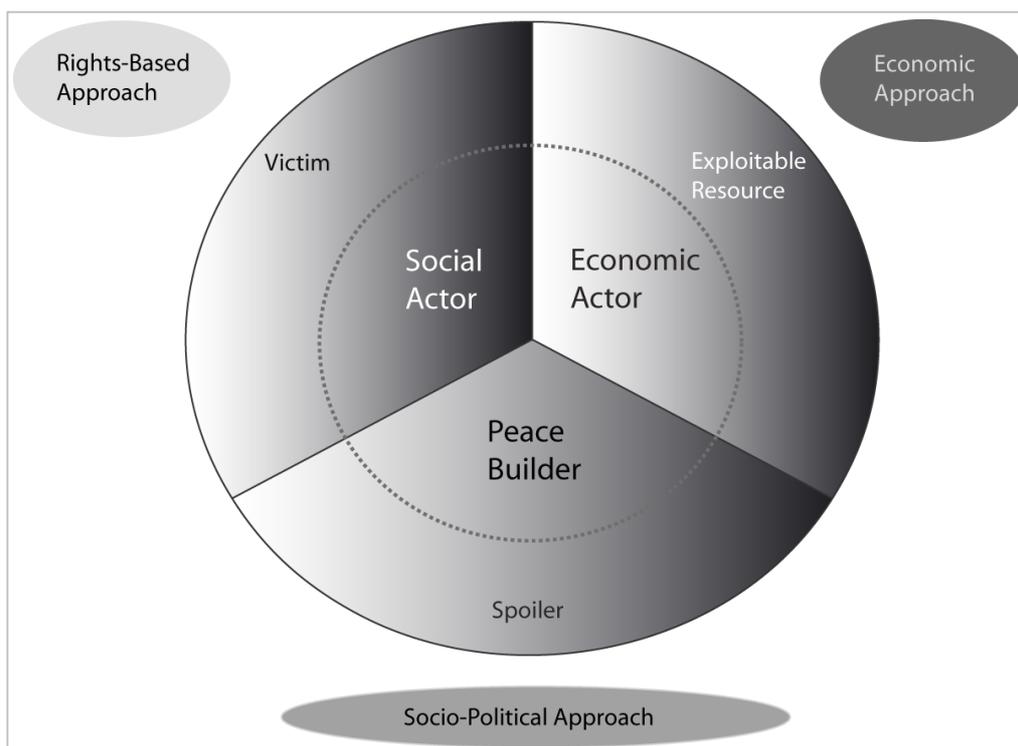
“Most international organizations operate on the basis of international conventions, and youth don’t exist as a category in any convention”, affirms Ms. Specht from Transition International, “some organizations try to include them but all on an ad hoc basis and because of bright program officer on the ground but not structural.” (Interview 2004) There are some pilot projects or single components of projects targeting youth in many organizations, but they do not amount to a strategy even within these organizations. As a result, it comes to no surprise that youth programs substantially differ from region to region and from case to case. The need for a coherent approach towards youth is both reflected and exacerbated by the lack of statistics on this target group, and the inconsistencies in the existing ones

(Sommers 2003: 13). In general, “fragmentation and duplication of youth policies and programs” abound (La Cava/Lytle 2004: 29), calling for a more integrated approach towards youth.

5.1 A New Perspective on Youth

All three approaches make a convincing case for targeting youth in post-conflict situations, demonstrating both their roles in times of war and peace. The rights-based approach views youth as *victims* of a violent environment that can undermine their rights as *social actors*. The economic approach would regard them as *economic rational actors* whose lack of alternatives can render them *exploitable resources* in armed conflict. The socio-political approach stresses their active potential as *agents for change* whose inability to make decisions can turn them into *spoilers of the peace-building process*. In advocacy campaigns, it is tempting to dwell only on the war images and minimize capacities for peace.

Illustration B: Roles of Youth in Post-Conflict Situations

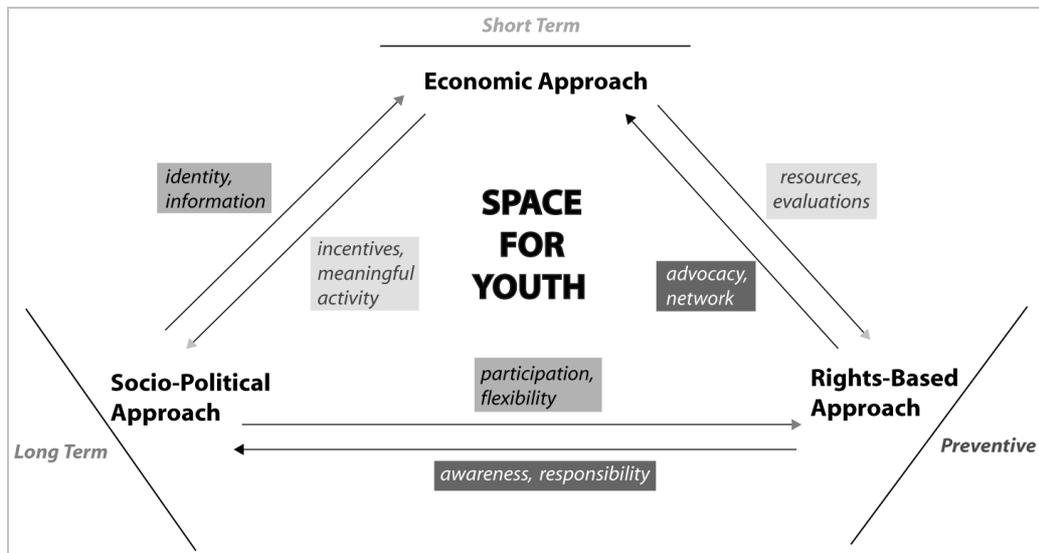


If passive or threatening notions of youth prevail, however, they can easily spill into actual programs and incapacitate the beneficiaries. If youth are victims, why would programs burden them with decision-making? If they are exploitable resources in

armed conflict, why should they receive vocational training? If they are spoilers in the peace-process, why should one empower them? International organizations have to envision youth in their roles in the peace rather than reducing them to their roles during war.

All approaches should thus converge in their common objective to create an enabling environment for youth in post-conflict situations. Effective targeting of youth instead consists in offering them ‘space’: by protecting them from forced recruitment, giving them a job perspective, furthering their personal development, and asking for their opinion and action. In fact, legal, economic, and socio-political dimensions are all necessary features of war-to-peace transitions. In order to make them compatible, the challenge is to adapt them to youth.

Illustration C: Holistic Approach towards Youth



Moreover, the approaches’ different levels of intervention and ultimate objectives translate into distinct optimal areas of intervention in post-conflict peace building. The rights-based concern with the human security of the individual is most effective in the preventive stage. Its legal and institutional framework can ensure that both political and socio-economic rights are protected, addressing some of the root causes for the outbreak of violent conflict. It promotes equity by development rather than power by acquisition of arms (Bajpai 2000: 4). The economic approach’s focus on the stability of the state - as a discontinuation of violent conflict - renders short-term interventions most appropriate. The approach can thus provide youth with immediate counter-incentives to fighting in armed forces, promising them both income and meaningful activity. Finally, the socio-political approach’s objective of changing inter-societal relations towards reconciliation requires a long-term vision.

The peace process can benefit from youth's relative independence from traditional structures and help them find their role in society.⁵⁰

At the same time, the response of international organizations towards youth in post-conflict reconstruction must remain flexible, as different phases of the peace-building process are difficult to separate in reality. Each approach has a different feature to contribute as demonstrated in Illustration D. The socio-political approach adds insights on youth's identity and their role in society, the economic approach offers incentives, and the rights-based raises awareness on a community, national, and international level. The harmonization of approaches thus becomes a priority because of the synergistic effects of investments that make a "tracing causes and identifying priorities" a complex if not impossible endeavor (World Youth Report 2003: 56).

5.2 The Socio-Political Contribution: Putting Beneficiaries First

Complementing the economic and rights-based approach, the socio-political approach allows one to both perforate the artificial division between children and youth, and allocate resources more prudently. It supports (self-initiated) organizations and networks because they facilitate investments. Most efforts for youth rely on a principled rights-based approach along the lines of the CRC so that organizations and programs do not have to adapt to changed identities and social setting in post-conflict societies. Many organizations, indeed, struggle to synchronize definite policy guidelines and parameters of action with community-based approaches. They want to give young people "special protection and status" because of their "developmental status" without depriving them of their "rights to participation in politics and social reconstruction processes" (McEnvoy-Levy 2001: 6). There is actually no unified agreement on a child development so that criteria like age and maturity (CRC Art.12) have to be subjective (Hart et al. 2004: 50). The rights-based approach would thus gain coherence by acknowledging this subjectivity and integrating young people's perceptions into programs.

Furthermore, it would be crucial to learn more about the effect of identity and gender on recruitment potential to design adequate employment strategies. Going beyond the economic approach's question of how the existence of youth influences war, the socio-political approach asks how the existence of war influences youth's decision-making processes. Depending on youth's acceptance in their communities as a result of the war, for example, targeted economic programs for them could be

⁵⁰ The psychologist Benjamin B. Wolman adequately describes youth in terms of dependency: Whereas children are still dependent, adolescents strive for independence. They do not yet realize, however, that adulthood means accepting interdependent structures and contributing to society. (1998: 5f.)

endorsed or avoided. Likewise, the changing roles of girls and women as a result of the conflict could also open up formerly male-dominated professions for them or change parents' attitudes towards education for girls. Simply asking what is appealing to youth can already give important insights into what kind of vocational training or income-generating activities are likely to be sustainable. In general, the socio-political approach can increase programs' success by placing youth's concerns before organizational interests. While all three approaches support participation for youth in principle, their definitions are inconsistent and their interpretations considerably vary in practice (World Youth Report 2003: 54). It is paramount that young people are involved in the conceptualization, the implementation and the evaluation. In the end, putting beneficiaries first means regarding them as partners and involving them in all phases of the decision-making processes.

If there is no common agreement among international organizations on the perception of youth, they might end up wearing two different 'sets of lenses' for the same group of beneficiaries depending on whether they are 'protectionists' or 'promoters'. Purely protectionist notions emphasize forced recruitment against voluntary recruitment, which underestimates the dynamics of protracted conflict and neglects the "subversive and revolting character of youth" (Interview Leonhardt 2004). UNICEF has already admitted to "the need to consider more carefully (the) intersection of participation and protection for children and adolescents" (UNICEF 2004a: 3). In fact, much of UNICEF's strategy paper on youth participation already reflects the socio-political approach because it recognized that their "participation builds civil society" (UNICEF 2001: 10). A more flexible rights-based approach would increasingly tally with economic or socio-political programming for persons who surpass the target age group of 18 years.

In addition, the socio-political approach triggers the question on what level youth's input is most needed and effective. There is a danger to stage youth on "higher-level settings" and focus on the "more visible" ones, such as child soldiers or street children (UNICEF 2001: 2).⁵¹ Debating with the mayor how he spent the youth budget may be of greater value for youth than spending 90 minutes in a virtual discussion forum with high-level officials and other young people worldwide (Leonhardt Interview 2004). Community-based organizations can advance more

⁵¹ Together with the World Bank Institute (WBI) and the Bank's Global Development Learning Network (GDLN), UNESCO has, for example, organized a series of videoconferences for representatives of youth organizations as "intercultural youth exchange[s]" (UNESCO 1999: 7f.) UNESCO praises Internet discussions as a simple and cheap way for involving youth. The influence of these (virtual) meetings remains doubtful though since youth often talk about issues they are not knowledgeable about or that affect them more indirectly (Leonhardt Interview 2004). They can usually have more influence in their direct surroundings like the household, the village primary school, or the informal economy (UNICEF 2001: 2).

direct participation, using their close contacts with local and regional actors (WCRWC 2000: 69f.). There must always be a concept on how participation benefits youth in their local context.

5.3 The Economic Contribution: Incentives for Partnership

Whether programs can orient themselves to youth and become more process-oriented depends on the availability of sufficient funds that endorse these goals. Organizations following the economic approach can profit from youth's increase in self-esteem and skills, the information, and organizational structures, which are the result of participatory programs. In turn, they can respond to youth's need for an occupation and income and 'buy time off' beneficiaries to engage in recreational activities, surveys, or youth clubs.

At present, there are no clear funding mechanisms for youth so that programs targeting them only receive ad hoc, short-term and usually low funding. Even adolescents, who fall under the CRC, rarely benefit from specific programs but are often included "in broader funding schemes for children or for communities as a whole" (Sommers 2003: 28; WCRWC 2000: 65f.). Making financial resources available for youth programs can help de-emphasize the fairly arbitrary 18-year mark for distributing economic resources. It can also force organizations to produce statistics on youth and develop coherent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that are responsive to this group's particular needs.

Representing the economic approach, the World Bank sees its 'added value' for the youth sector in its financing capacities, influence on policy makers, analytic capacity, and wide-ranging regional knowledge. As such the World Bank would be an important actor to mainstream the youth topic not only through its own organization, for example through its Country Assistance Strategies, but also to introduce it to its various partners; the Youth Employment Network (YEN) has been the first step towards this policy. Rather than including youth merely as "components" in the reconstruction or conditioning aid upon their inclusion, the draft strategy would favor "stand-alone youth investments" in country programs (La Cava/Lytle 2004: 27).⁵² Through this targeted assistance, the World Bank wants "to have real impact on youth policies overall" and avoid the "scattered" and thus futile investments "at the micro-level." The mechanism would, of course, involve local authorities and institutions throughout the process. (La Cava/Lytle 2004: 27).

⁵² The Bank renders Adaptable Program Loans (APLs) and Learning and Innovation Lending (LILs) the most effective instruments for stand-alone youth investments (La Cava/Lytle 2004: 31f.).

In addition, the World Bank's strategy paper proposes a global fund for youth administered by the World Bank⁵³ and supported by UNICEF. The fund is a reaction to similar trends on the subject of youth worldwide and would follow the positive experience with the Post-Conflict Fund.⁵⁴ (La Cava/Lytle 2004: 32f.). Furthermore, it can account for the multi-causal nature of youth's exclusion and the variations in costs and benefits according to society, gender, and group (La Cava and Lytle 2004: 27; World Youth Report: 56f.).

Through these activities, organizations following the economic approach do not only provide incentives for youth but also for organizations to recognize youth as a crucial actor in war-to-peace transition. A series of carefully chosen case studies could counter a widespread belief among donors that youth are no serious concern for political and economic stability; they could make the case for investing in youth. At the same time, international organizations must also reflect on the impact of systematic failures on youth, including the effects of globalization, inequalities, arms proliferation, unemployment, and structural violence. Geoffrey Oyat from the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers considers poverty to be one of the greatest obstacles in designing DDR projects for children and youth, "The promotion of programs like vocational training meets serious challenges as the graduates normally fail to sell their skills because of a non-functional economy" (Oyat Interview 2004). Creating an enabling environment for youth is at the core of all three approaches, but youth programs cannot be expected to solve global problems.

5.4 The Rights-Based Contribution: Advocacy and Awareness

The rights-based approach lends itself as an advocacy and awareness-raising tool for uniting a broad-based coalition on the issue of youth. Not only can it refer to legal standards but it can also count on its existing global network. Furthermore, the rights-based approach has the advantage of including all underage persons regardless of gender, capacities or vulnerability. It takes into accounts the many hazards young people face, one of which is recruitment (McCallin n.d.). Child protection agencies may need to advise governments on social and health policies for youth as some of them lack prior experience in this sector. In many cases, to become effective, however, advocacy will need to move beyond legal and moral

⁵³ The newness of the youth sector and the smallness of youth projects could possible restrain a pure country-based strategy because of scarce budgetary resources for the preparation and supervision of investment projects. The youth sector might thus not be able to compete with more established sectoral activities and economies of scale (La Cava/Lytle 2004: 32).

⁵⁴ In comparison with a self-standing trust fund supported by bilateral donors, the global fund would be the more flexible and timeless option: it can include partnerships with corporate foundations (La Cava/Lytle 2004: 32f.)

obligations to political and economic persuasion. For this purpose, it has to win a new set of actors, mainly from the private and security sector, convincing them that working with young people is a matter of interest, not compassion.

The rights-based approach's advocacy efforts also have to relate to civilians' rights to account for those above the age of 18 but also the rising number of 'quasi-adults', who have adult responsibilities but no legal rights. The 'youth' issue should thus be discussed in the context of democratization and 'good governance'.⁵⁵ In some African countries, there is an ongoing debate about lowering the voting age as a result of changing socio-demographic conditions, possibly involving a discussion on expanding political rights like voting ('Should the voting age be lowered', *BBC News* n.d.; McIntyre 2003: 6). A former Ugandan child soldier maintains, "Legalizing their entry into the democratic decision-making process will encourage young people to be more responsible citizens with a greater stake in their countries' democratic process" (McIntyre 2002: 6). This extension of the rights-based approach would also address the situation of girls, for instance, who lose all opportunities to socialize regularly with peers and the community outside their homes when turning 18 (Hart et al. 2004: 33). Since exclusion of youth tends to be carried into the early twenties due to unemployment and unstable conditions, it is crucial to follow up beneficiaries with adequate advocacy and programming. If credible, the rights-based approach has to promote a gradual disintegration of gerontocracies, i.e. power structures based on age.

Next to the macro-level of advocacy, the rights-based approach still has to trickle down to the local level. Judging from his psycho-social work with child soldiers in Mozambique, Mr. Efraime Junior believes that the approach's "effect could be very powerful in changing people's attitudes towards the role of children in society." "If we do not manage to enter into an alliance with the [local] authorities in the affected countries", Mr. Efraime, Jr., claims, "the attractiveness of our programs is relatively low" (Interview 2004). Youth should, of course, always be involved in these advocacy campaigns. While national youth councils can be more active on advocacy and monitoring, local youth organizations can ensure the actual implementation of policies (La Cava and Lytle 2004, 29). Raising awareness for the rights of children, adolescents, and young citizens is a crucial element in preventing their exploitation in the future.

Overall, raising awareness also means providing information and making processes transparent to beneficiaries and their communities. All three approaches highlight empowerment, whether through rights, income and employment, or

⁵⁵ The GTZ has already recommended making the inclusion of youth a criteria for good governance (Rollin 2000: 1). The World Bank's Youth for Good Governance and Anti-Corruption Program is training youth to become monitors for their governments (La Cava and Lytle 2004: 4).

participation in decision-making processes. Programs need to prepare both beneficiaries and their environment for possible success or failure and raise awareness for obstacles and sensitivities throughout the process. Wherever programs targeted youth apart from the community- because of norms or profit-maximizing purposes, preferential treatment sparked jealousy and opposition from community members and peers if they felt excluded. Transparency is thus crucial in creating realistic expectations and preventing unwarranted fears on the side of the beneficiaries or the community.

5.5 Cooperation and Coordination

Coordination and cooperation are indispensable in order to avoid duplication, profit from comparative advantages, seize synergy effects, and gain greater coherence in programming. As a result of the CRC's strict age division, however, organizations apparently assign responsibilities and roles according to age. Ms. Tovo from the World Bank even spoke of an informal "division of labor" in DRP according to age range: „We have experience on both, but mostly on the adult side because we generally rely on UNICEF, Save the Children or other specialized agencies to take the lead on child soldiers." In the case of Afghanistan, UNDP's programs thus mostly target the reintegration of young people from the age of 18. Young people below that age are considered child soldiers by international law and dealt with by UNICEF for special reintegration efforts (Swamy 2004: n.pag.). Ms. Tovo admits, however, to the fact that "adolescents (...) seem to straddle these two categories" (Interview 2004), referring to adults and children.

The case of Afghanistan also illustrates the lack of coordination among international organizations on young soldiers. UNICEF has thus operated single-handedly, separately from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) because of personal disputes between the representatives of the two organizations (Interview Chrobok 2004). Ms. Tovo from the World Bank echoes the perception of the importance of the "individual personalities and the situations" in programs for young people. She partly attributes the successful cooperation work of the Bank on youth programs in the Ivory Coast to the fact that "the main technical assistant for DDR used to work for ILO" (Interview 2004). In the end, this leaves youth programs up to arbitrary decisions of individual employees; it, however, does not amount to a regulated process.

Improving coordination would be crucial to allow the young beneficiaries to profit from each organization's area of expertise. Such an exchange of knowledge and experience could result in more professional programming. UNICEF has recently asked ILO for its assistance in labor market analysis for employment of youth for the first time although anybody above the age of 15 years is allowed to work. "This is the

first time that UNICEF even thinks about employment issues although anybody above the age of 15 years allowed to work, just not the worst forms”, comments Ms. Specht, “You cannot send them young people home but have to give them something more substantial” (Interview Specht 2004).⁵⁶ UNDP is also currently in the process of evaluating possibilities for the increased involvement of the private sector in youth issues, which has so far remained fairly excluded (Swamy 2004). Equally, economic programs have resorted to the socio-political approach’s network. The Balkan Youth Foundation used the YPCPP network to distribute information of grants available to youth groups in Kosovo for example (IRC/UNDP 2001a). There seems to be a gradual awareness of utilizing comparative advantages and of cooperating.

The objective should be a broader coordination of youth programs in any given conflict and in any given country. Working groups could focus on the oldest of child soldiers, who are older than 15 years and are thus allowed to work, and the youngest adult program participants. The Security Council has already supported the deployment of child protection advisers as advocated by the Secretary General’s Special Representative for children in armed conflict (Secretary-General 2003). Such institutionalized mechanisms would ensure coherence and coordination when coupled with sufficient funds appropriated for youth programs. Strengthening a bottom-up approach, the World Bank has already initiated a program called “youth voices”, an advisory group of young people that links up with country offices. The outcome of such initiatives, nevertheless, ultimately depends on the recognition and resources given to the ‘youth topic’.

Even though there has been considerable progress in the last few years, no persons involved in DRP and/or youth programs could explain why more is not done on youth programs in war-to-peace transitions. The reasons for targeting youth seemed, indeed, so persuasive that many interviewees merely referred to a lack of political will. “The case for targeting youth is clear”, as one interviewee noted, “If you have a person of 17 years who was forced to be a child soldier and in charge of other child soldiers [and] who has developed leadership skills and societal skills, cognitive and evaluative skills, why not utilize skills – why not use these skills for healing and transforming the community? They have experienced a lot, they have strategies, and they have survived – so why not tap into that?” Maybe organizations are the ones that have yet to pass through a major transition.

⁵⁶ In Mozambique, individual psychosocial therapy for child soldiers in Mozambique had been so expensive and benefited so few that UNICEF changed it to “vocational training with psychological support” as a more viable option (Maslen 1997, 16f.)

6 Outlook

Countering youth's regular exploitation and marginalization in violent armed conflict, international organizations are gradually realizing the chance inherent in a group of people at a time of personal orientation and questioning of conventional structures. This study has identified, explained and compared three paths that international organizations have taken to conceptualize youth's role in post-conflict peace building. Reflecting each theoretical approach through the eyes of practitioners and program experiences revealed their actual value in the field. In sum, the approaches' different concepts of youth converge and suggest concrete programs if organizations account for youth's potential in peace than reducing them to their roles during war. International organizations accordingly need to engage in a partnership with youth, provide them with economic incentives and raise awareness for youth concerns on a local, national and international level. Above all, they have to cooperate and coordinate to benefit from the approaches' distinct perspectives, dimensions, and instruments.

Because of the novelty of the topic on the international agenda, many organizations were still in the process of evaluating their programs when conducting this study. This limited the choice of suitable programs for presenting the various approaches. Although the virtual absence of 'youth' as a target group in the demobilization and reintegration sector made the analysis of programs and their comparability difficult, it also indicated the necessity to allot greater attention and resources to this particular group. It appears that war increases the number and significance of persons who cannot be considered children anymore but have not yet reached the societal status or expected maturity of adults; peace studies lack behind this development. Scholars should thus introduce a youth-centered perspective to conflict analysis. For this purpose, additional participatory research studies on youth in war-affected areas are urgently needed to inform both programming and research. There is a dangerous tendency of merely subsuming the youth topic under the child category. This study thus perceives itself as a first step towards a more in-depth reflection on organizations' work on this subject.

Furthermore, strategy papers of several organizations document a willingness to give greater attention to youth that they should be held accountable to through monitoring and evaluations in the field. Case studies in DRPs can test the utility, relative strength, and compatibility of the three approaches in different contexts. It would also be pertinent to investigate whether the three approaches only apply to certain phases of the peace-building process or whether there are possibilities to apply them throughout. Organizations tend to defer the socio-political approach to the time after the immediate post-conflict phase, which removes youth from agency

at a decisive period of the peace process. The question remains what their basis for action is if not beneficiaries themselves.

This study has deliberately given all three approaches the same degree of reflection. In reality, the rights-based approach dominates the international response towards youth and is the only one explicitly mentioned as an approach despite its apparent deficiencies. Scholars and practitioners should thus continue the interdisciplinary path, introducing a new set of actors to the field. Above all, youth themselves have become a viable actor in both the debate about their impact and in actual peace-building efforts. Jeremy Goldberg, director of development at Seeds of Peace, and Parag Khanna, senior research analyst at the Brookings Institutions, demand to include youth in peace processes, “Youth are on the frontlines of these conflicts; they are the soldiers, the victims, and all too often the suicide bombers. It’s about time they were put on the frontlines in the battle for peace” (2003). In the end, grasping youth as an increasingly important player in conflict management involves moving organizations towards their new target.

7 Index of Sources

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BICC	Bonn International Center for Conversion
(UN) CRC	(United Nations) Convention on the Rights of the Child
DCOF	Displaced Children and Orphans Fund
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRP	Demobilization and Reintegration Program
ECFCG	European Centre for Common Ground
FREMILO	Frente de Libertação Nacional
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Development Cooperation Agency)
ICC	Interim Care Center
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MDG	Millennium Development Goals (of the United Nations)
NCDDR	National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
NGO	non-governmental organization
OTI	Office for Transition Initiatives (USAID)
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SCF	Save the Children Federation
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
TI	Transition International
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNDPKO	United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USIP	United States Institute for Peace
WB	World Bank
WCRWC	Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children
WHO	World Health Organization
WVI	World Vision International
YEN	Youth Employment Network