

DRAFT REGIONAL STRATEGY TO DISARM CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN AFRICA

In an effort to improve its role in addressing the impact small arms and light weapons has on children, UNICEF has supported the development of the following strategy for Africa. This document is a first attempt to identify the issues that should be addressed by UNICEF and its partners to lessen the impact on children of the increased availability of small arms and light weapons in African countries. The Draft Strategy will undergo further review and be fed into international, regional, and national programmes.

I. Context

The number of arms available in African communities is on the rise. Small arms and light weapons are serving as tools for armed conflict and armed rebellion. They are used increasingly to replace more traditional methods of conflict resolution and mediation. Their presence is adversely affecting the participation of children and youth in social systems.

Small arms and light weapons in Africa exacerbate ethnic, clan, and religious intolerance. The situation is further aggravated by the inability of youth to find belonging and identity, unemployment, by poor access to education and weak law enforcement structures. In many African communities small arms are seen as the only mode of defence of self, family and livelihood. The trend of children being armed by group leaders, family and communities, or arming themselves, is growing.

Poverty in Africa is a source of demand for small arms and light weapons. For many African children and youth, arms provide income; they can be traded for commodities such as food or used illegally to gain necessary funds for survival. Children familiar with small arms and light weapons in Africa are almost guaranteed places in rebel movements or drug cartels.

Local weapons markets readily supply small arms and light weapons to children. Arms in Africa either come new from developed countries, or they are recycled from country to country in the region. Abandoned stocks are often sold, sometimes illegally, due to ineffective regulation of arms held by militaries and other armed groups.

In the case of large scale armed conflicts, the situation of children is even worse. Violence, death and injuries result in long-term psychosocial problems for children, and far-reaching social and economic consequences. The culture of violence is self-perpetuating and can lead to high crime rates, including domestic and sexual violence, vigilantism and incapacitated social structures. Security is threatened; family structures breakdown; and social and political stability remain a distant reality.

II. Lessons learned

Addressing issues related to small arms and light weapons within the context of its work on children is a new approach for many of UNICEF's country offices. Lessons from other programming, as well as the experiences of partner organizations provided important guiding lessons at the Accra workshop for UNICEF in its work on small arms, children and youth.

The key guiding lessons drawn from the group are summarized below:

Working with partners

UNICEF country offices in Africa have a strong history of working in partnership with host countries and non-governmental organizations. Experiences can be carried over to work on small arms, children and youth, including:

- Identifying competencies and using these to best effect, recognizing that some organizations may be better suited to implementing certain activities than UNICEF itself.
- Leading and supporting efforts on children and small arms at the policy level is often a method of cooperation between UNICEF and other UN bodies.

Youth participation

Youth participation was identified as a crucial component of effective work in issues related to small arms, children and youth. Experiences shared included:

- Youth participation is built over time and is established by trusting and listening to youth.
- Youth are often under intense pressure to take up arms and efforts need to be focused on preventing the rearmament of youth in post-conflict situations and where crime and gun-violence are prevalent.
- Children must be encouraged to be children.

Integration into country programmes

Working on small arms issues can complement existing programme work. It would not be practical in most contexts to establish separate small arms programmes, so there is a need to integrate small arms into existing programmes. The advantages of this approach include:

- Reinforcing areas of activity already underway
- Reducing the need for additional resources
- Building on the competencies of UNICEF and its partners

Political sensitivity

In some situations, especially countries in conflict, the discussion of small arms is seen as a political issue, which could reflect negatively on UNICEF and its partners. It was also recognized that not all existing agreements and legal conventions on children or small arms are respected by all countries.

Participants agreed, however, that with careful planning, good knowledge of country situations and a strong child-focus, UNICEF could manage these risks.

Under the broad umbrella of concern for the well being of children, UNICEF is able to engage diverse actors in order to advance the causes of children, a positive indication of how UNICEF could work on small arms issues.

Advocacy

Advocacy and awareness raising are areas where UNICEF has specific experience and where its partners can play an important role.

An example drawn from experience includes the effective use of eminent persons groups on children and small arms in West Africa to draw attention to the issue small arms and the negative impact they have on children and youth.

Sustainability

Combating small arms and light weapons will require a long-term approach recognized in country programming. The small arms issue should be addressed not only in emergency response programming, but be entrenched in more sustainable development assistance activity as well. It was noted that often projects are not sustainable when international support ends.

III. Role of UNICEF

Workshop participants agreed on the importance of UNICEF playing a role in addressing the impact of small arm as part of its programming at international, regional and country levels and discussed its possible role. Some of the ways in which UNICEF has been working, and will continue to work on small arms issues include:

At headquarters level

- Policy development for UNICEF's global strategy on small arms.
- Coordinating action at the international level within the UN system and with international non-governmental organizations and networks (e.g. the International Action Network on Small Arms - IANSA).
- Developing an advocacy tool box on small arms and landmines for distribution to country offices.
- Maintaining the UNICEF small arms website.
- Displaying the UNICEF/UN Department of Disarmament Affairs exhibit on small arms.
- Identifying activities at the global level that will support the work of country and regional offices, including, for example, a child and youth focused injury surveillance database.

At regional level

It is anticipated that much of the programmatic work on small arms, children and youth will be devolved to the two regional offices for sub-Saharan Africa. These offices will coordinate with headquarters and country offices on initiatives in developing Africa-focused programmes with country offices and UNICEF partners.

At country level

Country level is where the principle action will take place. Section VI of this strategy lists priority responses developed by the workshop participants. A summary of these activities follows.

- Consultations to identify country-level activities on children, youth and small arms with UNICEF and partners, including meetings with national small arms commissions and UNICEF offices not represented at the workshop
- Developing national strategies/structures with existing groups
- Publication of an advocacy document based on the workshop process in English, French and Portuguese and the use of the advocacy document for country-level work
- Joining IANSA and other regional networks (www.iansa.org)
- Developing funding proposals where additional resources are required
- Identifying data collection priorities and ways of gathering information, for example through:
 - Formal surveys
 - Available information
 - Information sharing

Tools for UNICEF

Five categories of tools, each with specific activities that can be used by UNICEF for its work in small arms, children and youth were identified: advocacy, networking, education and training, research and data collection and youth participation. Working with the media (radio, print and television) was identified as an important activity that fitted into each of the tool categories.

These are described in more detail in section V of this strategy, and briefly listed here.

ADVOCACY

- Mainstreaming small arms, gender and children within the UN system, among NGOs and at regional and country levels.
- Advocacy with the political leadership, including lobbying for the enactment and enforcement of legislation.
- Thematic campaigns on issues related to children, youth and small arms.
- Fair allocation of resources by local and state institutions.
- Rebuilding of institutions and positive values.
- Pressure on non-state actors to respect existing norms and standards on children and small arms.

- Promoting weapons collection and destruction efforts.
- Eminent and prominent persons and goodwill ambassadors advocating for children's interests.

NETWORKING

- Engaging with existing networks on children's issues and small arms.
- Youth consultations through networks and schools.
- Establishing an African small arms and youth network.
- Developing and sustaining engagement with national and regional small arms and youth commissions.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- Capacity-building programmes for youth to develop skills on disarmament, peace and non-violent conflict resolution.
- Integrating small arms modules into existing peace, conflict resolution and prevention training.

RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

- Defining the scale and impact of small arms on children and youth.
- Surveys to identify the issues to be addressed and the scale of small arms availability and use by children and youth.
- Researching weapons collection and destruction experiences as they affect youth.
- Disarmament and reintegration experiences of child ex-combatants with a focus on preventing rearmament.
- Experiences of children and youth in violent situations other than armed conflict.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

- Youth consultations through networks and schools.
- Developing programme designs that are participatory and inclusive of youth.
- Giving children space in the media.

IV. Role of Partners

UNICEF has a strong tradition of working closely with partners, some of whom implement programmes at global, regional and country levels. This experience and tradition of partnership can be applied to work on small arms, children and youth.

In some instances, partners are able to engage more easily than UNICEF in processes that are viewed politically by some stakeholders. In others, partners have the specific experiences, skills or knowledge to implement activities in a way that plays to the competencies of both UNICEF and the partners.

It was suggested that UNICEF country offices may need to work with new partners who bring specific issue knowledge of small arms to the programme work, highlighting the active use of networks to share information and experiences.

V. Approaches and Action

Objective	Actions
Disarmament of armed children and youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for the inclusion of children in peace agreements • Documentation of the DDR process, including data collection on numbers of children and quantities of weapons collected • Baseline surveys on the impact of small arms, attitudes toward arms and responses among children and youth • Engagement of the private sector and NGOs in advocacy and support for DDR programmes
Reintegration of children and youth to prevent rearmament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy and awareness raising with parents and communities • Monitoring and advocacy on commitments regarding the non-conscription of children and youth • Monitoring the rearmament of children • Advocate and raise awareness among security forces and armed groups/non-state actors on existing norms in order to prevent the rearming of children • Advocate for policy change within the security sector at regional and national levels to raise awareness of issues related to children and small arms, for example, improving the functioning of child protection units • Expand programmes for women and girls (including girl mothers) and ex-combatants to include vocational training and specialized psycho-social care • Incorporate longer-term approaches to the reintegration of youth
Prevention of arming and mobilisation of children in militaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy to prevent recruitment of children under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child
Mainstreaming children, youth and small arms issues in policy and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy and sensitisation within UNICEF offices • Sharing information with UNHCR and other UN agencies • Specific communication campaigns on children and SALW • Public awareness in conflict and non-conflict settings on the impact of SALW on children • Policy development on dialogue with non-state actors, and the development of guidelines for field offices • Link the impact of small arms on all children, including civilians, refugees and internally displaced persons • Share information within UNICEF, across UN agencies and with partners • Support or develop networks on small arms and children • Meet with national commissions on small arms to mainstream child and youth issues • Work with human rights organizations on small arms, human rights and children • Work with women's organizations and others to take up small arms and children issues
Education, child development and vocational training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish gun/violence free zones • Develop publicity/public information on child-focused themes • Include anti-violence curriculum in early childhood development • Diversify vocational training for girls and young women • Link training and education to agricultural sector strategies • Introduce small arms issues and non-violence training into school curricula at the primary and secondary levels

Youth Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate youth consultations with partners at local, national, sub-regional levels • Build conflict resolution and mediation skills • Establish youth-to-youth small arms network
Peacebuilding and Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct long term research on refugee, IDP and other war affected youth to identify reintegration patterns • Engage schools in peacebuilding through literature, extracurricular peace clubs, sports, drama and theatre • Conduct research on juvenile laws, age for weapons possession, and criminality among youth • Identify partnerships and promote collaboration on judicial reform • Conduct peace education training in prisons
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise small arms programmes and allocation of resources within country offices • Fundraise among national and international agencies, including the private sector

VI. Priority Responses

Workshop participants identified a number of responses appropriate to their diverse country contexts and programming areas. Some UNICEF offices and partners are working in conflict or post-conflict situations, while others approached the problem from a preventive angle. Nonetheless, the demand factors responsible for the proliferation of small arms show commonalities that call for similar responses.

ADVOCACY

Mainstreaming was identified as a common starting point, within UNICEF and partner activities, as well as raising awareness of the issue among partner agencies, faith-based organizations, NGOs and youth organizations. Some of the activities recommended are:

- Community-oriented and/or media-based public awareness campaigns;
- Addressing domestic violence and child abuse and encouraging the investigation, reporting and prosecution of these;
- Advocating for enforcement of firearms law and focusing on youth in firearms amnesty campaigns;
- Advocating for better public security and visible policing to restore public confidence;
- Advocating for restorative justice and involving young offenders in awareness campaigns;
- Licensing of handguns to responsible members of community and monitoring so they do not fall into hands of children;
- Support regional and international efforts by joining networks on small arms and support the creation of regional and country based networks;
- Monitor the implementation of national and regional instruments, such as national firearms legislation and the ECOWAS moratorium on small arms;

- Encourage states to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the use of Children in Armed Conflict.

NETWORKING

With the diversity of contexts and programmes, the importance of using available networks, joining existing ones and creating new ones was recognised. The importance of sharing experiences, lessons and challenges in this relatively new programming area was often emphasized. Networking can occur in the following ways:

- Working with religious organizations, NGOS and youth organizations;
- Linking small arms, children and youth issues to education and health systems;
- Linking with development programmes, particularly those addressing small arms demand related problems, such as poverty and lack of education;
- Participation in the activities of IANSA;
- Encouraging African NGOs to create an African network on small arms, children and youth;
- Regular meetings with national organizations working on small arms;
- Liaison with national and regional bodies, such as national commissions on small arms.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A lack of education and training opportunities is a significant element in the demand for small arms, particularly where there is the risk of re-armament in post-conflict situations. Small arms issues can be integrated into reintegration and reinsertion efforts on behalf of children and youth, including through:

- Vocational training
- Literacy
- Visiting child ex-combatants in homes to monitor follow-up behaviour and attitude changes
- Cultural and recreational activities to enhance peace
- Conflict resolution and prevention training

Education can also play an important preventive role, and opportunities for integrating small arms awareness into existing curricula come in many forms, including:

- Introducing small arms components into peace education programmes;
- Sensitisation on dangers of arms
- Provide children with pictorial and audio visual samples of small arms, teach them what to do/not to do when they appear in communities;
- Integrate small arms into existing training programmes for police, peacekeepers, social service providers and others to understand the risks associated with availability of small arms to children and youth.

RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

Effective responses require knowledge of policies related to children, youth and small arms, as well as an understanding of their impact, which groups are at risk and the effectiveness of ongoing and past interventions. Data from surveys, such as those exploring attitudes toward arms, can inform public awareness campaigns and help in effectively targeting education initiatives. Some of the priority actions in this area are:

- Documenting on-going activities on small arms;
- Qualitative and quantitative data collection on children, youth and small arms;
- Research on risk factors for early warning/preventive action;
- Partnering with research institutions.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Where demand for small arms is related to perceptions of insecurity is status-related and violence is cyclical and socially embedded, giving youth the opportunity to express needs and aspirations and to participate in activities will be extremely valuable. In a broader way, youth participation in community and organizational decision-making and in recreational and cultural activities can address the problem of exclusion. Youth role models speaking to youth may be the most effective way of getting across sensitisation messages and to discourage gun cultures. Youth participation can be encouraged by:

- Engaging youth in community level research;
- Formal consultations with youth;
- Youth participation in design of public awareness activities;
- Community theatre and sports activities.

DISARMAMENT, WEAPONS COLLECTION AND DESTRUCTION

UNICEF intervention to control the supply of weapons as well as the factors that drive the demand for weapons can include:

- Assessments of arms availability among child or youth combatants;
- Maintaining a child-aware focus in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes;
- Support for arms collection and destruction programmes;
- Developing programmes aimed at reducing the threat of arms to children;
- Collection and replacement of toy weapons;
- Disarming children of non-firearm weapons, for example knives.

VII. Challenges

The challenges faced in raising awareness and addressing the impact of SALW on children and youth fall broadly into three categories:

- Political issues
- Programme development in conflict and non-conflict areas
- Mainstreaming collaboration and networking

Political issues

The prioritisation of children on state agendas varies widely. In conflict situations, the primacy of national security concerns over child protection has meant that the consequences of arms acquisition and proliferation have not necessarily been recognized as a child rights issue. In addition, both state and non-state actors have denied or overlooked the problem of child soldiers and militarisation of youth. Some of the challenges faced in this regard are:

- That explicit references to child soldiers and war-affected children have been omitted from peace negotiations and peace frameworks, resulting in a lack of child-focused DDR schemes;
- There are not always solidarity mechanisms for organizations working on similar issues;
- The nature of warfare can make access, information gathering (i.e. problems with transparency and data availability) and programming difficult or impossible;
- There may be the perception by either state or non-state actors that that organizations are acting politically and organizations themselves can have difficulties in maintaining neutrality;
- States need to be encouraged to follow up on commitments, including reporting on the CRC, implementing the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and other efforts.

Programme development

Where violent/gun culture have become socially and economically embedded, raising awareness and addressing the impact of small arms can require profound changes in livelihood patterns, behaviour and even culture itself. In contexts where the impact is still contained or controlled, demand factors may still call for preventive measures. Common challenges in these contexts are:

- Addressing psychosocial impacts throughout childhood and youth, including early childhood;
- Education and training interventions need to be long-term, sustainable and linked to social and economic development. Post-conflict reintegration schemes in particular must reflect economic needs, including the restoration of agriculture/food production;
- Perceptions of and real insecurity lead people to arm themselves to protect livelihood;
- Cultural and behavioural changes may be necessary where arms become a part of the identity of communities, ethnic groups or clans.

Mainstreaming, collaboration and networking

UN agencies, NGOs and child rights advocates have made great strides in raising the profile of children at the global level. There is still much work to be done in the area of children and small arms, and further efforts are necessary to meet these challenges:

- Prioritisation and support within UNICEF offices, re-alignment of programmes to accommodate children and small arms issues;
- Mainstreaming of children and youth in DDR programmes and giving a child focus to the work of other UN agencies;
- Identifying good partner agencies with a mandate to work on small arms;
- Inventories and surveys of existing training materials;
- Information sharing and collaboration on developing research methods;
- Building the capacity of civil society agencies and promoting their acceptance by governments.