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**BUILDING BRIDGES:
SPORT AS A TOOL FOR THE
REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN
AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICT**
A Case Study of Colombia

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ABSTRACT

In a world where armed conflicts are not limited to battlefield or soldiers, children are increasingly affected by their devastating consequences. State Parties have the responsibility under Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to promote the reintegration of these young victims. The objective of this thesis is to examine whether and how sport can be used as a tool for the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict. After discussing the various impacts of conflict on children and the gaps between legal obligations and practice, the conditions for a successful reintegration of conflict-affected children are explained. Taking these various elements into consideration, the benefits of sport will be discussed, as well as its limitations and challenges. Finally, the case study of Colombia analyses the opinions of coaches, coordinators, mentors and government officials on sport as a reintegration instrument. Moreover, it allows child victims to speak up about their own experiences with sport and how it influenced their reintegration process.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AUC	United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
ELN	National Liberation Army
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OSRSG-CAC	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict
SDP IWG	Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
TJ	Transitional Justice
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
U.S.	United States of America

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INTRODUCTION

We are all the same when we score a goal

- Displaced child in Colombia¹

Armed conflict increasingly affects the life of innocent children.² When the government fails to protect the most vulnerable group of its population, it is obliged under Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to promote their reintegration. In this thesis, I will analyse sport as an alternative strategy to realise the successful reintegration of conflict-affected children through sport. The first aim is to make a modest contribution to the efforts of scholars, practitioners and policy makers in improving this process and in achieving more sustainable, long-term results. After all, the reintegration of victims and ex-combatants constitutes an important part of the peacebuilding process. The failure of this process can generate new tensions, nourish the root causes of armed conflict and can even result in a violent re-collapse.³ The importance of its effectiveness is, therefore, invaluable. However, there is a scarcity of scholarly articles that examine the role that sport can play in the reintegration process. Moreover, there is a significant lack of qualitative and quantitative studies that monitor and evaluate the efficiency of sports programmes in reintegrating child victims.⁴ The second main objective of this thesis is to contribute to the limited literature and studies on this topic and to stimulate more research in order to make reintegration programmes

¹ This displaced boy testifies in a video of the Colombian organisation *Colombianitos*. However, his name is not mentioned in the video. CAF, SOMOS – Colombianitos, Colombia (English), 1 December 2014, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKTp8yN7Mdw> (consulted on 13 June 2015).

² Choonara & Rieder, 2012, pp. 59 – 60; Machel, 2001, p. 119.

³ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, 2008, p. 5; MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, pp. 18 – 19; Nilsson, 2005, p. 30.

⁴ Cárdenas, 2013, p. 3; Dyck, 2011, p. 397; SDP IWG, 2008, p. 206.

using sport more effective.

The main research question that will be addressed in this dissertation is: “How can sport be used as a tool for the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict?” This will be preceded by answering the following subsidiary questions: “What is the impact of armed conflict on children?”, “Why and how should successful reintegration be achieved?”, “What are the benefits of using sport for the reintegration of conflict-affected children?” and “What are the disadvantages and challenges of using sport for the reintegration of conflict-affected children?”

The nature of armed conflict has transformed drastically over the past decades. Whereas until the beginning of the twentieth century wars took place between two or more countries on a battlefield, they underwent a change to more ethnic or intra-state armed conflicts, even covering highly populated areas. Lately, there has also been an increase of terrorist and suicide attacks, the availability of small arms and the use of indiscriminate weapons, such as mines and cluster bombs. It goes without saying that this has an extensive impact on the lives of the civilian population. More and more innocent people become the victim of the devastating consequences of armed conflict.⁵ This is especially true for the most vulnerable amongst us. Children are disproportionately affected by conflict: they have to flee, are exploited, recruited and exposed to violence or cannot enjoy education anymore.⁶ At this moment, approximately 230 million children are living in armed conflict, reported the United Nations Children’s Fund.⁷ Many governments will fail to fulfil their duty to protect these children. Efforts should, therefore, be put in successfully reintegrating these conflict-affected children.⁸

Sport brings people together all over the world, it does not care about social differences, borders or ethnic backgrounds. Aside from its universality and inclusiveness, it has been

⁵ Choonara & Rieder, 2012, pp. 59 – 60; Machel, 2001, p. 119; Ryan, 2013, pp. 26 – 27.

⁶ UNICEF, 2009, pp. 3 – 5;

⁷ UNICEF, 2014, para. 3.

⁸ UNICEF, 2009, pp. 3 – 5;

proven that sport has a positive impact on people's physical and mental well-being.⁹ In recent years, more and more international and local organisations recognised the power of sport in development and peacebuilding. The Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace, created in 2001, and the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group explicitly stated their belief in sport as a tool to help victims of armed conflict, child soldiers, persons with disabilities and their social reintegration.¹⁰ A literature study and a field trip to Colombia will help to determine if this is the case and what the advantages and limitations are.

The research questions will be answered in five chapters. The first chapter outlines the conceptual framework. The Rights of the Child is one of the two areas dealt with in this part. It will talk about the context of children in armed conflict, the reasons for the increasing attention and the articles and documents that are relevant for this thesis. The second subsection will define and elaborate on the concepts of peacebuilding and transitional justice. They are treated as a main overarching area of this research, because reintegration initiatives can be regarded as part of these processes.

In the second chapter, the impact of conflict on children will be addressed. Divided over five subsections, the main consequences of conflict for children will be discussed: child soldiers and other forms of exploitation, displaced children, sexual and gender-based violence, physical disabilities, diseases, mental and other health problems and finally, disrupted access to education. For each of these subsections, the main legal instruments, relevant definitions, problems and challenges are set forth. This chapter has the objective to show the reader that there is still a gap between government's responsibility to protect and to take measures on the one hand and the harrowing reality on the other.

The third chapter will tackle the importance of a successful reintegration process of conflict-affect children. It will, first of all, give a brief overview of the applicable

⁹ Cárdenas, 2013, pp. 6 – 7; Dorokhina, Hosta & van Sterkenburg, 2011, p. 12; Dyck, 2011, p. 404; SDP IWG, 2008, p. 212.

¹⁰ Ravizza, 2008, pp. 2 – 3; SDP IWG, 2008, pp. II – VIII, 85.

legislation. This will be followed by a broad definition and some general remarks about reintegration. Furthermore, I will explain the various conditions that increases the chances of a successful and sustainable reintegration of these children. Not only support from family and community, education, vocational and other skills training have been identified as important elements, but also health and psychosocial recovery, safety and protection and lastly, inclusion in decision making and re-establishing positive identity, social norms and routines.

In the fourth chapter, I will examine sport as an alternative way to create these favourable conditions for reintegration. The first subsection will give a general legal framework and background of sport, specifically in the area of peacebuilding. This will be followed by an analysis of the possible benefits of sport as a tool for the reintegration of conflict-affected children: sport as a safe space, as an inclusive space for dialogue and reconnecting and sport as a classroom for learning skills. Also the disadvantages and challenges of sport will be tackled afterwards. To illustrate the readers how this works in practice, two relevant initiatives of Colombia will be discussed.

The fifth and last chapter presents a case study about the Colombian conflict, the history and the impact on its children, mainly in the areas of child recruitment, displacement and landmine victims. For these categories, some striking statistics will be provided, together with Colombian legislative initiatives that have been issued to tackle these pressing issues. The last subsection will present the results of my field trip to Colombia. I will examine whether the interviewed children, government officials, coaches and other stakeholders affirm the effectiveness of sport in the reintegration process and how they perceive its benefits and disadvantages.

Finally, the thesis ends with a conclusion in which the main findings are discussed and the research questions are answered. For the reader's comfort, every chapter will begin with an introduction and end with a conclusion.

METHODOLOGY

In this thesis, I adopted a qualitative research approach and worked with a variety of sources. For the literature study, I collected the information from laws, books, scholarly articles, doctrine, newspapers, relevant websites and many reports from UN agencies and NGOs. Furthermore, in order to help answering the main research question, a study trip was undertaken to Colombia from the 23rd of April, 2015 until the 7th of May. The qualitative methods that were used during this field trip were participatory observation and semi-structured interviews. They were chosen, because it allowed me to gather personal information, to ask for the motives, to quickly respond to certain interesting answers, to hear their stories and feel their emotions.¹¹ My presence in the field, during the trainings, was enriching for the research, as I could see the impact of sport myself and verify the information that was given during the interviews.

Colombia was chosen, because of its long internal war, the tremendous impact on the Colombian children and the importance of football and sport in the country¹². Due to financial and time constraints I visited only four cities: Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, Medellín, the second biggest city of the country, Manizales and Barbosa. During the first days in Bogotá, I tried to arrange a trip to one of the remote areas of Colombia, where the conflict is still very present and many reintegration programmes for child soldiers can be found. However, the contacted organisation, War Child, dissuaded me. The trip would take too much time and would hold considerable security risks. During the two weeks, I interviewed affected children, coaches, coordinators of the

¹¹ Beyens & Tournel, 2010, pp. 203 – 215.

¹² The justification for Colombia as a case study will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5 “Case study of Colombia”.

reintegration programmes and government officials. In total, 24 official face-to-face and 6 written interviews were conducted, of which 14 children, 13 coaches and other relevant employees of the programme and 3 persons from government institutions. The following actors provided information for my thesis: *Tiempo de Juego*, different chapters of *Colombianitos*, *Fundación 'Caminos, promoción de estilos de vida saludable'*, *Proyecto Juego*, *A Step to Hope*, *War Child*, *Coldeportes* and *Sistema Nacional de Juventud Colombia Joven*. When the 'theoretical saturation of data' was reached and the answers became predictable, no more people were interviewed. After all, it is not this thesis' intention to make generalising or statistical statements.

Each interviewee got explanation about the thesis and the objectives of the field trip and interviews. This allowed them to give their informed consent about the interview, the recording of the conversation, the use of quotes and the decision to remain anonymous. Most of the interviewees agreed with using their quotes and identity. In case of the children, it were the organisations that made the decisions related to the interview and that gave their approval about the questions. In some cases, the organisation preferred that no official interviews with the children were conducted. Therefore, the answers and remarks of those children were included in my observatory notes. For psychological reasons, no questions were asked about how the conflict had affected them, unless the children decided to tell themselves. The organisations, however, explained in general the impact that the conflict had on the children. Mostly, they were internally displaced, had lost family members because of the war or were under constant threat of recruitment. The interviews with the children took place during their football or karate practice, off the field and separated from the other children. They were chosen by the coach or volunteered to be interviewed. I chose to have a balance in the amount of interviewed boys and girls and to have a variety in age, with the youngest being 10 years and the oldest 17. The interviews with the government officials, coaches and other mentors were conducted in their offices or after practice. One person was interviewed through Skype and a few coaches answered the questions through mail. The questions that were asked to the children differed from the ones asked to the adults. First of all, the questions for the children were formulated in a more child-friendly way, although

children older than sixteen years were questioned similarly to the adults. Furthermore, in contrary to the children, the adults were explicitly asked to give the pros and cons of using sports in this reintegration process. The interview changed slightly depending on the answers, but the interviews remain comparable.

One of the greatest challenges of this trip was the language barrier. The level of my Spanish is not sufficient enough to fully understand or engage in a conversation. Therefore, I had to look for a translator or a person within the organisation that could speak English. Only one time I had to search for a translator, because in all the other cases, the interviewee spoke English or there was an English-speaking person in the organisation who agreed to take the role of translator. However, I am fully aware that both situations are not ideal and can compromise the information. First of all, interesting information during the observations were missed, because I could not understand, for example, conversations between children. Secondly, nuances and information get lost in translation: not every word is translated or covers the same meaning in English. However, most interviews were entirely recorded, so the quotes used in the thesis can be checked again for any translation mistakes. Furthermore, the connection with the children and the other interviewees is more distant, which can hinder opening up to a complete stranger. I counterbalanced this disadvantage partially by speaking and listening directly to the interviewees instead of the translator. Nevertheless, the presence of a third person can have a negative impact on the interview. It is more likely that children or colleagues give answers that are expected from them, rather than giving their own opinion. In this way, interesting information may get lost, which can influence the results of the research.¹³ On the other hand, the translator was a coach or volunteer, who had already gained the full confidence of the children. They started every interview with introducing me, my thesis and the objectives of my field trip. The fact that I was participating or watching their practice gave them more confidence to open up and to even volunteer for an interview. It is clear that there are both advantages and disadvantages attached to this method.

¹³ Evans, Gray & Reimondos, 2011, pp. 3 – 5.

CHAPTER 1: Conceptual framework

Before I immerse the readers into the core research of this study, it is important to make them familiar with its outline and its main concepts. As the starting point of this thesis is armed conflict, the latter should be clarified. International humanitarian law differentiates two types: international and non-international armed conflict. As there might be slight differences between the definitions proposed in treaties, jurisprudence and doctrine, I opt to use the explanation put forward in the 2008 opinion paper of the International Committee of the Red Cross.¹⁴ Summarised, armed conflict is described as an armed confrontation between two or more governmental armed forces, between them and the forces of one or more armed groups or amongst the latter¹⁵. This description will serve as a red line throughout the thesis.

In this first chapter, I will lay out the conceptual framework by discussing the two main pillars in separate subsections: the rights of the child on the one hand and peacebuilding and transitional justice on the other hand. Both areas have been the subject of many academic studies, controversies and discussions. However, the limited scope of this dissertation does not allow to engage in every debate. Only the ones related to this topic will be touched upon. Furthermore, the relevant definitions will not be discussed here, but in the corresponding subsections.

¹⁴ International Committee of the Red Cross, 2008, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵ “1. International armed conflicts exist whenever there is resort to armed force between two or more States.

2. Non-international armed conflicts are protracted armed confrontations occurring between governmental armed forces and the forces of one or more armed groups, or between such groups arising on the territory of a State [party to the Geneva Conventions]. The armed confrontation must reach a minimum level of intensity and the parties involved in the conflict must show a minimum of organisation.”

1.1. The Rights of the Child

As the title of this thesis has already revealed, children, their rights and the overarching legal framework will be one of the main areas dealt with. In this study, I will use the broadly accepted definition put forward in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which describes a child as: *“every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.”* Although this clause gives countries the flexibility to alter the age of majority, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends state parties to expand the protection by raising the limit and thus including more children under the definition.¹⁶

The abovementioned Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations (UN) on the 20th of November 1989. This international treaty became one of the most ratified human rights treaties. 195 countries have become state party, with Somalia and the United States of America as the only exceptions¹⁷. Although this Convention intends to secure economic, emotional and physical protection and development for every child in a non-discriminative manner, the implementation of this treaty fails regularly. Notwithstanding the significant improvements since the adoption of the Convention, the important monitoring work by the Committee on the Rights of the Child¹⁸ and the opportunity of an optional individual complaint mechanism, children still face a lot of challenges, especially in

¹⁶ UNICEF, n.d., para. 1.

¹⁷ South Sudan was the last country that ratified this Convention. It did so on the 23rd of January 2015. Somalia is in the final stages of ratification.

¹⁸ This UN Committee consists out of 18 independent experts that are tasked with the supervision of the implementation of the CRC and its two Optional Protocols, on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000) and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2000), inter alia, through the analysis of State Parties' periodic reports. Furthermore, they examine individual complaints about alleged violations of the Convention and its Optional Protocols by State Parties of the third Optional Protocol on a communications procedure (2012).

the midst of an armed conflict.¹⁹ Former minister of Education of Mozambique and independent expert, Graça Machel, was the first one who succeeded to bring the challenges of children in armed conflict under full international attention. Her report “Impact of Armed Conflict on Children” is a true milestone and was approved by the General Assembly in 1996. Her alarming findings even led to the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The mandate was established by the General Assembly through resolution A/RES/51/77 in 1996 and is extended by the same body after a period of three years. Its main mission is to raise awareness and to promote and protect the rights of all children affected by armed conflict. The Special Representative presents her report every year to the key agencies, such as the Security Council and Human Rights Council, in order to draw attention to current violations against children in conflict. Violating parties to the conflict are listed in the report and have to adopt an action plan in which they commit to the UN to take measures.²⁰ The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict plays an important role in this regard. It was established by Resolution 1612 (2005) and has the task to review the annual reports of the Special Representative and the abovementioned action plans. These reviews also contain recommendations on ways to protect children in armed conflict and are eventually published as a Security Council Document.²¹

The drafters of the Convention of the Rights of the Child recognised the particular vulnerability of children in conflict. Article 38 CRC emphasises the duty of the state parties to protect and respect the applicable rules of international humanitarian law and to provide protection for the civilian population, with a special focus on children. Furthermore, this article specifically deals with the recruitment and use of children in the armed forces. Some matters of child soldiers have been the subject of legal instruments and Security Council Resolutions, but many issues are left

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, 2014, para. 1 – 6.

²⁰ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAC), 2011, p. 5; OSRSG-CAC, n.d. (a), para. 1 – 8; UNICEF, 2009, p. 2.

²¹ Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict., n.d., para. 1 – 8.

unaddressed. Most of these documents focus on child soldiers as victims. However, it cannot be ignored that these children have committed crimes and can therefore also be considered as perpetrators. A lot of academics have already discussed this topic and until today this seems to be a sensitive and divided discussion. Although the space is lacking to substantiate my opinion, this debate cannot be ignored, in particular because this thesis will deal with all conflict-affected children. Disregarding the discussion about child soldiers as solely victims, solely perpetrators or both, we cannot go around the fact that these two categories fundamentally differ: child soldiers have committed offences, the others have not.²² This difference can be of importance for the thesis, as sport can have another effect or needs a particular implementation or approach.

Furthermore, measures for the reintegration of children that have become a victim of an armed conflict are encouraged in Article 39 CRC. This clause can therefore be considered as the most applicable legal ground for this research, as the thesis will focus on an alternative way to achieve reintegration of children affected by armed conflict. More information about this concept will be provided in chapter 3.

The last, relevant legal basis for this thesis can be found in Article 31 of the CRC. It recognises the importance of leisure, play and recreational activities for children and recommends state parties to offer appropriate and equal opportunities.

²² Leveau, 2013, pp. 36 – 37.

1.2. Peacebuilding and Transitional Justice

War is one of the inevitable evils of this world. It leaves many lives shattered and societies broken. A successful transition to peace, consequently, demands a lot of efforts and is a tricky undertaking. This is where peacebuilding enters the scene. As a concept, it first arose in 1976 through Johan Galtung, who wrote about ways to promote sustainable peace. However, it was not until former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's report, "An Agenda for Peace", in 1992 that the concept became widespread and extensively discussed.²³ The emergence of peacebuilding can be seen as a consequence of the changing nature of wars from inter-state to more ethnic or intra-state conflicts, an increasing international involvement and demand for peace operations after the end of the Cold War. The democratisation wave, a stronger belief in the protection of human rights and the emerged liberal peace doctrine also had their influence.²⁴

A definition of peacebuilding can be found in the UN report of 1992, which has been refined in other documents, such as the Brahimi Report of 2000.²⁵ In this thesis, I will use the 2007 description of the Secretary-General's Policy Committee:

*A range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development.*²⁶

Although not specified in this definition, it is important to emphasise that peacebuilding should be based on national ownership and can already commence

²³ Ryan, 2013, p. 26 – 28; United Nations, 2010 (b), pp. 1 – 5; United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, n.d., para. 1.

²⁴ Ryan, 2013, pp. 26 – 27.

²⁵ United Nations, 2010 (b), p. 5; United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, n.d., para. 1.

²⁶ Ibidem.

during the conflict. Activities such as supplying basic services, encouraging certain conflict resolution strategies, rebuilding national capacities, etc. can facilitate and speed up the work of peace builders once there is a negotiated reconciliation agreement or when components of peace are present.²⁷ Apart from local governments and regional and international civil society organisations, the UN Peacebuilding Commission, created by the General Assembly (resolution A/60/180) and the Security Council (resolution SC1645) in 2005, and the various UN peacekeeping missions have a significant role to play in this regard.²⁸ The Commission is mandated to "*marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery*"²⁹, while the majority of the missions are generally authorized to conduct peacebuilding activities, such as the reform of the security sector, guidance of electoral processes and governmental transformation.³⁰ Many of these peacebuilding elements are also covered by transitional justice processes, notwithstanding the possible tensions between both. These two areas are obviously linked to each other and to the topic of this thesis.³¹

The development of transitional justice (TJ) can be situated in a similar context as the one for peacebuilding. Especially the post-Cold War transformations in various European countries, the transitions in South-Africa and other African countries affected by conflict and the recovery after military dictatorships in Latin-American countries strengthened the call for transitional justice measures in order to address the many human rights violations and to reinforce the rule of law.³² For the definition of this concept, we turn to the 2010 Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice, which describes TJ as "*the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure*

²⁷ United Nations, 2010 (b), p. 6.

²⁸ Ibidem, pp. 8 – 9.

²⁹ United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, n.d., para. 11.

³⁰ United Nations, 2010 (b), pp. 8 – 9.

³¹ Herman, Martin-Ortega & Lekha Sriram, 2013, p. 48 – 49.

³² Ibidem, p. 51.

accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation".³³ This can be understood in a traditional, narrow way which only focusses on prosecution initiatives and on human rights violations of civil and political nature.³⁴ However, the note clearly prefers a broader, more holistic approach, by referring to judicial as well as non-judicial methods and by dealing with the root causes of a conflict.

In various post-conflict and post-authoritarian societies we can find different practices of transitional justice.³⁵ There is no fixed list of possible methods. The use of mechanisms depends on the situation and country in which they are applied.³⁶ According to the International Center of Transitional Justice³⁷ and the 2010 UN Guidance Note, five elements of transitional justice can be distinguished: the justice reform and prosecution initiatives, truth-finding processes, reparation practices which try to make amends for past human rights violations and abuses, the institutional reform that aims at re-establishing a culture of respect for the rule of law, human rights and peace and lastly, the participation of all citizens and the inclusion of their needs in the TJ programme through national consultations and truth commissions in order to create a sphere of local ownership.³⁸ To these components, I also add the category of silence, which covers amnesty laws and silence agreements between the perpetrators and the new rulers. Although critics fear that this will lead to a culture of impunity, in some cases it can be beneficial for further conflict prevention and the peacebuilding process.³⁹ With regards to this research, especially the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes for child soldiers and rehabilitation initiatives for child victims are of great importance in the area of peacebuilding and transitional justice.

³³ United Nations, 2010 (a), p. 3.

³⁴ Cahill-Ripley, 2014, p. 187.

³⁵ Mihr, 2012, pp. 12 – 14.

³⁶ International Center for Transitional Justice, 2014, p. 1.

³⁷ The International Center of Transitional Justice is a non-profit organisation that provides assistance, expertise and knowledge in the area of transitional justice to relevant local, national and international policymakers, institutions, civil society and other stakeholders.

³⁸ International Center for Transitional Justice, 2014, p. 1; Mihr, 2012, pp. 13 – 14; United Nations, 2010, pp. 7 – 9

³⁹ Mihr, 2013, p. 301; Mihr, 2012, p. 14.

It should not be a surprise that these areas are the subject of a huge amount of academic research. Scholars and practitioners are seeking for ways to enhance the effectiveness of these mechanisms. Recently, more and more –well-deserved- attention has been given to the participation of women and youth in these processes. The fact that they have been neglected for so long and were never really seen as a partner in these practices could have been a factor in the failure of various peace transitions.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, peacebuilding is undeniably a very sensitive, complex and challenging balancing act that needs the involvement of various actors and a careful approach in an environment prone to conflict relapse.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Del Felice & Wisler, 2007, p. 3; O'Rourke, 2013, pp. 37 – 49; United Nations, 2010 (b), p. 30 – 35.

⁴¹ United Nations, 2010 (b), p. 1.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the two central research areas of this thesis. Firstly, the rights of children and the accompanying Convention form the basis of this dissertation. Article 1 of the CRC provides the definition of a child, whereas Articles 31, 38 and 39 are of particular importance for the thesis topic, as they sequentially cover the right to leisure, play and recreational activities, emphasise the state's responsibility to protect their citizens, tackle the issue of child soldiers and encourage the social reintegration of conflict-affected children. Although the latter population have gained more international attention since the report of Graça Machel, they still suffer from many violations. The second area focused on peacebuilding and transitional justice. Peacebuilding strategies intend to decrease the chances of countries (re)lapsing into conflict and to guarantee sustainable peace and recovery. Transitional justice measures, on the other hand, put the emphasis on dealing with human rights violations and abuses and on achieving accountability and reconciliation. Preferably, this includes judicial and non-judicial methods that also deal with the root causes of a conflict. Both processes are overlapping, but can also have a very different approach. DDR programmes and reintegration of child victims can be considered as elements of peacebuilding and transitional justice.

CHAPTER 2: The impact of armed conflict on children

In 1997, Graça Machel brought the tremendous impact of armed conflict on children for the first time under full international attention.⁴² Despite the numerous successful interventions and the increasing involvement of various actors, the challenges and obstacles remain manifold.⁴³ The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) recently released a press statement reporting that around 230 million children nowadays are living in armed conflict.⁴⁴ They are especially vulnerable to becoming victims of conflict-related violence and exploitation.⁴⁵

As this thesis will deal with the reintegration of conflict-affected children, it is important to first of all give an overview of the most significant consequences for children. This will provide the reader with the necessary background information in order to understand the necessity of a qualitative reintegration programme. Therefore, this chapter will discuss the particular vulnerabilities of children in conflict, as well as relevant statistics and legislation. However, not every effect of the conflict can be addressed within the limited space of this thesis. Sequentially, I will elaborate on following topics in consecutive subchapters: child soldiers and other forms of exploitation, internally displaced and refugee children, sexual and gender-based violence, physical disabilities, diseases, mental and other health problems and finally, disrupted access to education.

⁴² OSRSG-CAC, 2011, pp. 5 – 12.

⁴³ UNICEF, 2009, p. 3.

⁴⁴ UNICEF, 2014, para. 3.

⁴⁵ UNICEF, 2009, pp. 3 – 5.

2.1. Child soldiers and other forms of exploitation⁴⁶

Armed conflict creates and enforces unfavourable conditions that make it more likely for children to be subjected to various forms of exploitation, not only to recruitment in armed groups, but also to economic and sexual exploitation.⁴⁷ According to statistics of War Child, there are approximately 250 000 child soldiers nowadays, although not all of them participate directly in the conflict. An estimated 40% of them are girls, commonly used as sex slaves.⁴⁸ Thus, despite significant improvements, the gap between commitments and legal responsibilities on the one hand and practice on the other has definitely not disappeared yet.⁴⁹

Article 38(2) and 38(3) of the CRC prohibit the recruitment and the direct participation of children that have not reached the age of fifteen years into the hostilities. However, the vague language of this article has caused some interpretation issues. The wording of “take direct part in hostilities” has often been the topic of debates. The lack of clarification and clear distinction between “direct” and “indirect” in the legal instruments and the preparatory documents has even led to various explanations. Some scholars use a narrow definition, others prefer the broader one in order to expand the protection to as many children as possible. The latter one is also promoted by the Cape Town principles of 1997 and the Rome Statute in its preparatory documents and carries my preference as well.⁵⁰ Therefore, in this thesis I will use the definition as put forward by the widely recognized Paris Commitments and Principles, accepted in 2007 at an international conference on the recruitment of child soldiers and the importance of their reintegration. A child soldier will be considered as:

Any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by

⁴⁶ Although a separate subchapter could be devoted to other forms of exploitation, the limited space of this thesis does not allow an extensive elaboration on this subject. Other forms of exploitations will only be briefly dealt with in this subsection.

⁴⁷ Action for the Rights of Children, n.d., pp. 3 – 4; International Labour Organization, 2011, pp. 1, 6 – 7.

⁴⁸ War Child, n.d., para. 2 – 3.

⁴⁹ Child Soldiers International, 2012, pp. 15 – 17.

⁵⁰ Child Soldiers International, 2012, p. 45; Topa, 2007, pp. 107 – 108; UNICEF, 2003, p. 14.

*an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.*⁵¹

Given the nearly universal ratification of the Convention and the extensive proof of state practice, the prohibition of recruitment or participation of children under the age of fifteen is considered customary international law. Thus, in both international and non-international armed conflicts all states are bound by this rule.⁵² However, the 2000 Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which specifically focuses on child soldiers, aims at enhancing their safety by raising the age of compulsory and voluntary recruitment from fifteen to eighteen in case of non-state armed forces. For state armed forces this only applies for compulsory recruitment. The 159 parties of this Protocol commit to the prevention of such practices by state or non-state armed forces and to assuring that the voluntary recruitment of children in the national armed forces under the age of eighteen only takes place with informed consent and sufficient safeguards.⁵³ Furthermore, child soldiers have been the subject of several Security Council resolutions (i.e. resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011), 2068 (2012) and 2143 (2014)⁵⁴), whereas the progress on this matter is reviewed by the Security Council Working Group and advocated by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Paris Principles, 2007, p. 7.

⁵² Topa, 2007, p. 109.

⁵³ Child Soldiers International, 2012, pp. 15 – 16; Topa, 2007, p. 110.

⁵⁴ These resolutions mainly condemn the use of child soldiers, request for reports and action plans on these matters and welcome the creation of a reporting and monitoring body. The most recent resolutions deals with various triggers that cause parties to an armed conflict to be listed in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. Lastly, resolution 2143 launches the campaign “Children, Not Soldiers” in order to stop child recruitment and use by state armed forces in a conflict by the end of 2016.

⁵⁵ Child Soldiers International, 2012, pp. 115 – 117; OSRSG-CAC, n.d. (b), para. 1 – 16; Topa, 2007, pp. 107 – 113; UNICEF, 2003, p. 9.

To describe the other forms of exploitation, I use the definition of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) textbook (2004):

*Work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that: is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling (...)*⁵⁶

The ILO Minimum Age Convention of 1973 (No.138) strongly encourages the abolition of child labour and sets the minimum ages for labour. Forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, for hazardous work, the use of children in prostitution, pornography and illicit activities, as well as slavery, forced labour, sale and trafficking of children are considered the worst forms of child labour. They are mentioned in The Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour ILO Convention No. 182 (1999), which is currently ratified by 179 countries.⁵⁷ Besides Article 38 on child recruitment, the CRC offers more legal protection against other forms of exploitation, such as economic exploitation in Article 32, the prohibition of using children in illicit production and trafficking drugs (Article 33), sexual exploitation in Article 34, the prevention of abduction, sale or trafficking of children (Article 35) and the protection against any other form of child exploitation (Article 36). Article 39 CRC deals specifically with the reintegration and treatment of children that have become victims of exploitation or armed conflict. The two other main Conventions, The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights, tackle the issue of economic and social exploitation and forced labour respectively in Article 10(3) and Article 8.⁵⁸ There are quite some legal instruments dealing with specific forms of exploitation, but the space is limited to discuss them here into detail⁵⁹. The following frameworks are worth mentioning,

⁵⁶ International Labour Office, 2004, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Action for the Rights of Children, n.d., pp. 27 – 28; International Labour Office, 2004, pp. 46 – 48.

⁵⁸ Action for the Rights of Children, n.d., pp. 27 – 28.

⁵⁹ For the legal instruments, see Action for the Rights of Children, n.d., pp. 26 – 31.

because they cover the issue of child soldiers and other forms of exploitation: the Geneva Conventions of 1949, that prohibit enforced prostitution against civilians (Article 27 GC IV), Additional Protocol I (Article 77(2) for international conflicts) and Additional Protocol II (Article 4(3)(c) for non-international conflicts) to the Geneva Conventions, which both prohibit the use of child soldiers. Finally, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) has some interesting provisions. First of all, it states that the conscripting or enlisting of children under the age of fifteen into the armed forces of the state or their direct use in the hostilities amount to a war crime. Secondly, enforced prostitution and sexual slavery can amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Lastly, the ICC has no jurisdiction over crimes committed by child soldiers (Article 26).⁶⁰

Children are exploited for various reasons and under different circumstances. Poverty is a convincing reason for children to exchange their services for money, food or protection. As a consequence, youngsters join the armed forces voluntarily, because they will receive a remuneration which will enable them to take care of their family. It is also not a surprise that poor parents will be tempted to exploit their children, because they see it as the only way to assure money, regular meals, medical care and other basic goods.⁶¹ Furthermore, the conflict can cause a reduction of jobs in the formal labour market, which pushes children in more dangerous or illicit types of work. Additionally, due to a weak rule of law during conflict times, the control over child labour diminishes.⁶² Lastly, the access to education constitutes an important safeguard against exploitative child labour. It is a safer place, a way to escape the violence of the conflict and to fight poverty. Children that do not go to school are more likely to end up as a child labourer.⁶³

The conflict generates an atmosphere of terror and continuous violence. Being a part of the army gives children protection and a sense of safety, as they are better

⁶⁰ Ibidem, pp. 28 – 30; Topa, 2007, pp. 107 – 113

⁶¹ Action for the Rights of Children, n.d., pp. 12 – 15; Machel, 2001, pp. 8 – 11; War Child, n.d., para. 6.

⁶² International Labour Organization, 2011, pp. 5 – 6.

⁶³ Action for the Rights of Children, n.d., p. 15; International Labour Organization, 2011, p. 6.

able to defend themselves against violence. Other reasons to join include ideological, political or religious convictions and revenge for violence against friends and family.⁶⁴ However, many child soldiers were kidnapped and forced into fighting. Children are targeted frequently, because they are easily indoctrinated and brainwashed, they are cheap workforces and seem less fearful, especially when given drugs or alcohol. For some jobs, such as spying or carrying messages, small children are especially suitable.⁶⁵ The increased availability of light and small guns makes the choice for children even less complicated, because they can now easily join the shootings. While boys and girls have roughly the same tasks, such as fighting, cooking, household chores, and are even used as sex slaves for the soldiers, girls are also forced to marry the commanders. Moreover, the children are often subjected to torture, beatings and other abuses. This undeniably leaves scars and deep wounds, not only for the children, but also in the community.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Machel, 2001, pp. 11 – 12; War Child, n.d., para. 6.

⁶⁵ Machel, 2001, pp. 12 – 13; War Child, n.d., para. 4.

⁶⁶Carreiras, 2013, pp. 17 – 18; Machel, 2001, pp. 7 – 14; War Child, n.d., para. 4 – 5.

2.2. Displaced children

Conflict-related violence often forces adults and children to flee their hometowns in order to find safer locations. They are called displaced people. Most of them will stay within their country and are categorised as “internally displaced persons” (IDPs). Once they cross international borders, they will be considered “refugees”.⁶⁷ The latest statistical yearbook of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that 33.3 million people became internally displaced and 16.7 million refugee in 2013.⁶⁸ It is estimated that children account for 50% of the latter population⁶⁹.⁷⁰ In the next paragraphs, the particular vulnerabilities of displaced children will be explained.

In conflict zones, many families leave their homes, belongings and friends behind, out of fear for violence and death. The road to a safe haven, however, is not without any dangers. The risk to get killed by landmines or soldiers, to get abducted, to get sick or to run out of water or food is definitely real.⁷¹ Moreover, parents on the run with children can get separated from one another or decide to send their children to safer places and join later. Especially these isolated children will find themselves in a very unsafe situation. They are more vulnerable to violence, recruitment, abductions, exploitation and diseases. Often, it is very difficult for them to gain access to basic services, such as education or health services.⁷² Some minors are still accompanied by relatives other than their parents. They are called “separated children”. Others have to travel on their own or in a group, without any parent or guardian that takes care of them. They fall within the category of “unaccompanied children”.⁷³ Different organisations, such as UNICEF and UNHCR, have emphasised the importance of keeping the family together while on the run. If children get separated from their parents, siblings or other caretakers, they should

⁶⁷ Machel, 2001, p. 26.

⁶⁸ UNHCR, 2014, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Concerning IDPs, it is more difficult to estimate the proportion of people under the age of 18 as reliable information is lacking.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 62 – 63.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 26 – 27; OSRSG-CAC, 2010, p. 5.

⁷² *Supra*.

⁷³ *Supra*.

be reunited as soon as possible. The government and the international community should offer protection and play a role in tracing and re-connecting family members.⁷⁴

The arrival in a camp, a new city or country is not a guarantee for a better life. IDPs and refugees are mostly confronted with new challenges, risks and violence, while dealing with past traumas.⁷⁵ First of all, many internally displaced children that are not travelling with any relative find no shelter and end up in the streets, where they have to deal with its dangers. Except for the violence, hunger and diseases caused by unhygienic living circumstances, IDPs and refugees are also often stigmatised, socially isolated and discriminated in terms of access to health and other basic services, such as education. Yet, the latter is extremely important for protection, support and for the further development of the child.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the absence of the protection of a social network renders them more vulnerable to recruitment, forced marriage and exploitation. Most of the time, they have to work in illegal, dangerous or unhealthy circumstances and especially girls are at greater risk of sexual diseases.⁷⁷ Girls have an increased chance of becoming the victim of sexual and gender-based violence, not only while they are on the run, but even within the IDP and refugee camps, which are very often not as safe as expected. Reinforced by quasi-impunity, the authorities in the camps, such as security forces, humanitarian workers or the food distributors, frequently abuse their power to sexually assault girls or to offer food and money in exchange for sex.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the camps are under constant threat of the surrounding conflict. It is not uncommon that they are targeted by armed groups and that people within the camps get killed or injured. There is even proof that trafficking networks operate within the camps. This creates new psychosocial trauma, stress and a sense of unsafety. Additionally, armed groups have been abducting boys and girls from these camps in order to recruit

⁷⁴ Machel, 2001, pp. 28 – 30; OSRSG-CAC, 2010, pp. 5 – 6.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁷⁶ Machel, 2001, p. 35; OSRSG-CAC, 2010, pp. 11, 45 – 46.

⁷⁷ Action for the Rights of Children, n.d., pp. 35 – 40; International Labour Organization, 2011, pp. 6 – 7; Machel, 2001, p. 36; OSRSG-CAC, 2010, pp. 38 – 39.

⁷⁸ Machel, 2001, pp. 30 – 32; OSRSG-CAC, 2010, pp. 35 – 36.

them as soldiers. Besides security problems, refugee and IDP camps frequently have issues with providing sufficient food and qualitative health and other basic services.⁷⁹ Refugee children have a specific vulnerability in the sense that they have to cross borders and come into contact with other people, such as border guards and military. This creates more chance to become the victim of violence, abuse, abductions and even exploitation, because they have to offer sex or other services in order to enter the other country more easily.⁸⁰ Lastly, the establishment in a new area involves breaking with the community, can put a strain on exercising cultural and traditional practices and can cause tensions with the current residents.⁸¹

Although specific international binding laws about displaced children are lacking, they are still protected by various legal instruments. The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol are essential for refugee children, as they set out the rights and standards. Article 22 in particular is of great importance, because it requires the government to treat refugee and nationals the same with regards to primary education.⁸² Even when a country has not ratified the Refugee Convention, they are bound by the obligations under the CRC. The non-discrimination clause in Article 2 grants the rights in the Convention to all the children within the jurisdiction of the State Party, without any discrimination. Accordingly, this includes refugee and internally displaced children. Article 22 CRC is also of relevance for refugee children, as it deals with protection and family reunification.⁸³ For IDPs, there is no equivalent to the Refugee Convention. The most important instrument for internally displaced children is the 2005 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. They specifically recognise the particular needs and vulnerabilities of these children and include provisions about protection against i.e. violence, recruitment and exploitation, but also about the right to education and family reunification.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Action for the Rights of Children, n.d., pp. 35 – 36; Machel, 2001, pp. 36 – 38; OSRSG-CAC, 2010, pp. 28 – 34.

⁸⁰ Action for the Rights of Children, n.d., p. 13; Machel, 2001, p. 38.

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 34 – 39; OSRSG-CAC, 2010, pp. 50 – 51.

⁸² UNHCR, 1994, pp. 17 – 20.

⁸³ Ibidem

⁸⁴ OSRSG-CAC, 2010, pp. 14 – 15.

Finally, they are protected by national policies and regional instruments, such as the 2009 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and various recommendations of the Council of Europe.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Ibidem, p. 14.

2.3. Sexual and gender-based violence

The year 2000 marks a milestone for women and girls in armed conflict. In that year, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, which recognises the specific vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls in a conflict situation. It emphasises the importance of their participation and urges states to protect them from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). With the adoption of numerous resolutions⁸⁶, the Security Council remained actively seized on the matter.⁸⁷ The anti-discrimination clause of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as interpreted by the General Recommendation 19 of the CEDAW Committee, includes the protection against gender-based violence. Furthermore, the Rome Statute⁸⁸ took an important step by identifying SGBV as possible war crimes and crimes against humanity^{89, 90}. However, SGBV remains a huge problem during conflict and, despite numerous initiatives, the impunity is high and countries have failed to meet the standards.⁹¹

There are several acts that fall under sexual and gender-based violence. In this thesis, I will use the definitions of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Guidelines for Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings. First of all, gender-based violence is "*any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females*"⁹² and includes crimes like rape, sexual exploitation, forced

⁸⁶ The following resolutions aim at tackling sexual violence against women and girls in armed conflict and ending the impunity: resolutions 1820 (2008), 1882 (2009, specifically focusses on children and sexual violence), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013) and 2122 (2013).

⁸⁷ Bastick, Grimm & Kunz, 2007, p. 10; Manjoo & McRaith, 2011, pp. 23 – 25.

⁸⁸ This treaty establishes the International Criminal Court and recognises four core international crimes: crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide and the crime of aggression. It was signed on 17 July 1998 and entered into force on 1 July 2002. 122 countries are currently party to the treaty.

⁸⁹ Rome Statute: "For the purpose of this Statute, 'crime against humanity' means any of the following acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack: (...) (g) Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity;". A similar reference can be found under the section of war crimes.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 19 – 23

⁹¹ Ibidem, pp. 26 – 27

⁹² Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2005, p. 7.

marriage, sexual abuse and female genital mutilation.⁹³ Sexual violence is described as:

*any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic a person's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.*⁹⁴

Aside from rape and sexual abuse, it also includes forced pregnancy, forced abortion and sterilisation, sexual slavery and trafficking. In some conflict zones, there is a true plague of these sexual crimes. Although women and girls have a higher risk to be affected, men and boys, commonly regarded as the perpetrators, are often overlooked as victims of SGBV.⁹⁵ Especially boys and girls who are recruited as child soldiers repeatedly deal with sexual humiliation. Even in IDP/refugee camps, there have been many reports of SGBV against children. It is, however, difficult to estimate how many girls and boys have had to endure these offences, as the stigma, shame, impunity and fear for reprisals often prevent the victims to tell their story and find justice.⁹⁶

There are numerous reasons why sexual and gender-based violence is so prevalent in times of conflict. First of all, it is an easy “weapon of war”, as it spreads terror in a community, causes people to flee their houses and destroys family and community networks and even entire social or ethnic groups. Furthermore, it is used as a tool to torture and humiliate the enemy and to show their anger and dominance over girls and the rivalry group. The total absence of law and order in most conflict zones also contribute to these sexual violations. Moreover, SGBV is frequently encouraged by armed forces, because it boosts the aggression and

⁹³ Ibidem, pp. 7 – 8.

⁹⁴ Ibidem, p. 8.

⁹⁵ Bastick, Grimm & Kunz, 2007, p. 14; Carreiras, 2013, pp. 17 – 18; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2005, p. 8; Manjoo & McRaith, 2011, pp. 12 – 15.

⁹⁶ Supra.

fearlessness of the soldier. Lastly, some armed groups believe that the sexual abuse of virgins will give them special powers and will render them invincible. Sexual violence during conflict is, thus, much more than solely an expression of sexual frustration and a loss of inhibitions.⁹⁷

Women, girls, men and boys have to endure the horrendous consequences of these sexual violations. The impact on their health is evident: not only do they suffer from traumas, anxiety and depression, but also from physical injuries, such as infertility, severely damaged reproductive organs and miscarriages, and the transmission of HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Additionally, the social price that victims have to pay is enormously high. They are often stigmatised, marginalised and excluded, not only by the community, but even by their family and spouse. Raped or infertile girls will encounter difficulties finding a husband and will be rejected by their embarrassed families. Shame, stigma and mental disorders will keep victimised boys and girls from going to school, finding a job or other normal activities, which will reinforce poverty, exclusion and the chance for further sexual exploitation. Consequentially, the reintegration process of these children is long and very challenging.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Bastick, Grimm & Kunz, 2007, pp. 14 – 15; Carreiras, 2013, pp. 18 – 20.

⁹⁸ Bastick, Grimm & Kunz, 2007, p. 15; Manjoo & McRaith, 2011, pp. 16 – 17.

2.4. Physical disabilities, diseases, mental and other health problems

It is an undeniable fact that armed conflict has a negative impact on the health of children. Many youngsters have died because of the conflict, got severely injured or witnessed traumatic events which have led to mental problems. Furthermore, war goes hand in hand with sanitation and hygiene issues, disrupted access to clean water and health services, malnutrition and food shortage. This puts especially younger children at a higher risk of diseases and mortality.⁹⁹ Additionally, the nature of armed conflict has changed, in the sense that civilians and children are significantly more affected. The absence of a clear battlefield, the high availability and easy use of small arms, which are responsible for a majority of deaths and injuries, as well as the use of mines and cluster bombs that do not distinguish between soldiers and innocent children civilians and the increase of internal conflict, terrorism and suicide attacks contribute to higher rates of casualties among civilians and children.¹⁰⁰

According to the Landmine Monitor 2014, mines and unexploded ordnances maimed or killed 1 112 children, almost 50% of the total amount of mine/unexploded ordnances victims in 2013.¹⁰¹ The specific dangers of weapons, like landmines and cluster bombs, include the failure to distinguish military objects from civilians and the ability to make casualties even years after the conflict has ended.¹⁰² Especially children run a high risk of becoming a victim, as they are less able to recognise mines, less aware and are more likely to pick up things they are not familiar with.¹⁰³ The devastating impact of mines and cluster munition led to the adoption of the 1997 Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mine and on their Destruction and the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munition, adopted by respectively 162 and 92 countries. Moreover, mine awareness programmes for children and

⁹⁹ Machel, 2001, pp. 66 – 67.

¹⁰⁰ Choonara & Rieder, 2012, pp. 59 – 60; Machel, 2001, p. 119.

¹⁰¹ Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, 2014(d), pp. 33 – 34.

¹⁰² Choonara & Rieder, 2012, p. 60; Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, 2014(d), p. iii.

¹⁰³ Machel, 2001, pp. 106 – 107.

mine actions to clean mine fields are encouraged by many organisations. The treaties do not only advocate a world free of such weapons, but they also promote recovery, psychological guidance and social reintegration of children that have lost limbs or family members.¹⁰⁴

During an armed conflict, children can become victims of torture and all forms of violence, as well as witness horrible situations. This renders them more vulnerable to develop psychological problems, such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, etc. This is also true for child soldiers, who often deal with very violent and traumatising events. In some cases, child soldiers develop an aggressive and hostile mentality that make them dangerous for the community, even after the war has ended.¹⁰⁵

Armed conflict also influences the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and STDs in general. In the previous subchapter, I argued that girls and boys run a higher risk of becoming a victim of conflict-related sexual violence. This obviously heightens the chance of getting HIV/AIDS or any other STD. Furthermore, the access to qualitative health services is often disrupted during conflict, sometimes even on purpose, because it has a destabilising effect on an entire area. This results in many people remaining undiagnosed, young people not receiving valuable information and a higher risk of being exposed to contaminated blood. Moreover, HIV/AIDS patients have problems receiving treatment and medication.¹⁰⁶ Lastly, many children cannot enjoy any education due to the war, although it plays a vital role in spreading information and awareness on HIV/AIDS, STDs and healthcare in general. Unfortunately, HIV/AIDS still kills many people nowadays and children become orphans, which has an impact on every aspect of the child's life.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Choonara & Rieder, 2012, p. 60; Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, 2014(d), pp. 1 – 3; Machel, 2001, pp. 108 – 118.

¹⁰⁵ Choonara & Rieder, 2012, p. 61.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem, p. 61; Machel, 2001, pp. 41 – 45.

¹⁰⁷ Choonara & Rieder, 2012, p. 61; Machel, 2001, pp. 45 – 49.

Disruption of food production, food supply and healthy nutritional diets commonly occurs during wartime, as a deliberate strategy of the enemy¹⁰⁸ or as a consequence of the fighting. This is especially harmful for young children and increases the risk of dying at an early age, because they are starving and become less resistant to infections or diseases.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the vaccination and immunisation procedures of children are mostly interrupted due to the breakdown of healthcare, which increases the likelihood of incurring a childhood disease.¹¹⁰ The unhygienic circumstances in which many children live during armed conflict and the limited access to clean water result in a higher prevalence of communicable diseases, such as diarrhoeal ailments, respiratory infections, malaria, etc. These health problems are exacerbated in overcrowded, unhygienic situations, such as in IDP or refugee camps.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ According to Article 54(1) Additional Protocol I, Article 14 Additional Protocol II and Article 8(2)(b)(xxv) of the Rome Statute, starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited. This rule is part of customary international humanitarian law.

¹⁰⁹ Choonara & Rieder, 2012, p. 61; Machel, 2001, pp. 73 – 78.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 72 – 73.

¹¹¹ Choonara & Rieder, 2012, p. 61; Machel, 2001, pp. 67 – 69.

2.5. Disrupted access to education

Although various topics, such as child orphans, child abductions and the conditions of detention for child refugees and for alleged child soldiers, deserve more explanation in a separate subchapter, the limited space of this thesis does not allow to discuss every effect of conflict on children. In this last subchapter, I choose to elaborate on the more complex subject of war's impact on the education of children.

Every day, children in conflict zones experience difficulties going to school. They run the risk to get caught in the shootings, to get abducted or recruited. At the same time, teachers are being killed, threatened and have to flee their home towns.¹¹² A study from the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack found that between 2005 and 2012 in more than 50% of the 42 conflict-affected countries schools were used for military purposes.¹¹³

Attacks against schools or hospitals were identified as one of the six grave violations committed against children during armed conflict and were included in the mandate of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. In 2011, the Security Council reached a milestone with the adoption of Resolution 1998 concerning attacks on school and hospitals. This strongly opposes actions that interfere with children's ability to access education. Besides military use of schools and attacks, it also covers threats of attacking the educational infrastructure and the kidnapping and assaulting of teachers. The Resolution urges parties to not engage in these attacks and asks the Secretary-General to continue the monitoring and reporting of these violations.¹¹⁴ The right to education is explicitly protected in Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articles 13 and 14 ICESCR, Article 28 CRC and various regional human rights treaties. International humanitarian law does not ban the use of educational infrastructure for military

¹¹² OSRSG-CAC, 2014, p. 1.

¹¹³ GCPEA, 2012, p. 29.

¹¹⁴ OSRSG-CAC, 2014, pp. 3 – 5.

purposes.¹¹⁵ However, it does oblige armed forces to “*remove civilians and civilian objects under its control from the vicinity of military objectives*”¹¹⁶ and to protect them “*against the dangers resulting from military operations.*”¹¹⁷ Furthermore, State Parties have the responsibility to protect the access to education, both in international and internal armed conflicts¹¹⁸. Lastly, using schools in order to avoid attacks by the enemy is called ‘human shielding’ and is considered a war crime.¹¹⁹

Schools serve a variety of functions for armed groups, such as a military base, detention centre, storage place, an observation post, a space for military training and child recruitment, etc. Often, ammunitions are hidden in classrooms, army vehicles are parked on the playground and fortifications are put around the school.¹²⁰ This, of course, puts the students in grave danger and violates their right to education. The school becomes a target for the enemy and consequentially, the students and teachers are under constant risk of attacks and lethal crossfires. Regularly, students and teachers are being killed, injured or forced to work for the troops, while schools are being destroyed.¹²¹ The presence of military and fighting also influences the access to education. Schools are no longer a safe place, they have to close or are destroyed, parents keep their children at home out of safety reasons and often, there is no qualitative alternative. Moreover, the violence leaves a psychological impact on the children. In these situations, girls are specifically vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment.¹²²

However, the access to education is of utmost importance for children. It is, first of all, a safe place that gives students a sense of normalcy and routine in times of chaos. Schools offer protection from the consequences of conflict, such as recruitment and exploitation, and teachers disclose important information about for

¹¹⁵ GCPEA, 2012, pp. 51 – 53.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 51.

¹¹⁷ Supra. These provisions can be found in Article 58(a) and 58(c) API and Article 13(1) APII.

¹¹⁸ This is protected in Article 50 GCIV and Article 3(a) of APII.

¹¹⁹ GCPEA, 2012, pp. 51 – 53.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, pp. 22 – 25.

¹²¹ Ibidem, pp. 31 – 34.

¹²² Ibidem, pp. 35 – 41.

example, HIV and landmines. Furthermore, the school environment gives psychological comfort to child victims, but also enables them to build resilience. Finally, children are taught important life skills that will also benefit peacebuilding processes. The importance of education for children in armed conflict is therefore immeasurable.¹²³

¹²³ Ibidem, pp. 9, 21; OSRSG-CAC, 2014, p. 1.

Conclusion

From the moment independent expert Graça Machel presented her report in 1996 until now, there have been improvements for children in armed conflict, but many challenges still remain. In this chapter, I discussed some of the main consequences of conflict on children. Despite some legal safeguards, children are still serving as soldiers and submitted to other forms of exploitation, such as prostitution or slavery. Especially the situation of displacement makes children vulnerable to violence, discrimination, exclusion, abductions, poor health conditions and psychological problems. Statistics show that conflict causes enormous flows of refugees, of which approximately half are children. Children run a high risk of becoming victims of SGBV, not only in situations of displacement, but also as recruited child soldiers or in their hometowns. The stigma, shame, physical and psychological impact on the victims are immense. Conflict in general brings health issues: traumas, the loss of limbs due to mines, shot wounds, diseases, etc. Often, there is also a disruption of the health facilities, which hinders treatment and the disclosure of information. Lastly, I discussed the importance of education for children in conflict. Unfortunately, the access to schools is made more difficult due to violence, the killing and abductions of teachers and the military use of the educational facilities. Qualitative guidance is necessary in order to reintegrate these child victims.

CHAPTER 3: The importance of reintegration

Previous chapter aimed at demonstrating the devastating impact of armed conflict on communities, families and children. It can drastically change relationships, environments and socio-economic structures, as well as break down infrastructure, norms and attitudes. For children, it becomes very challenging to re-establish their status, relations and roles in the community and to reintegrate into a transformed, new setting.¹²⁴ Reintegration programmes should therefore focus on the elements that will allow them to become valuable and recognised members of the society again and to develop their abilities to the full extent.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the impact of these programmes goes beyond the individual or community level, as it also contributes to the safety of the society and the entire peacebuilding process.¹²⁶

This chapter is divided in six subchapters and will focus on the conditions for a successful reintegration of conflict-affected children. The first subchapter will delineate the legal framework and the definition of reintegration with some general remarks. The following five subsections will sequentially deal with support from family and community, education, vocational and other skills training, health and psychosocial recovery, safety and protection and finally, inclusion in decision making and re-establishing positive identity, social norms and routines. I identified these five areas based on my field experience and after analysing the literature on this topic. When all of these elements are taken into consideration, the reintegration of the children is more likely to be sustainable and effective.

¹²⁴ West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, p. 3.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

¹²⁶ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, 2008, p. 5; Nilsson, 2005, p. 30.

3.1. Legislation and definition of reintegration

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of (...) armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

This extract corresponds to Article 39 CRC, which lays out the legal basis for this chapter and recognises the need to reintegrate children that have become victim of armed conflict. Also Article 6 of the CRC Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict stresses the obligation of the State Parties to enable the social reintegration of former child soldiers. Yet, these legal frameworks do not provide an explanation about what reintegration encompasses. Other documents had to be consulted in order to find a suitable definition. Most of them specifically focus on the reintegration of child soldiers, for example in the Paris Principles¹²⁷ ¹²⁸. There is also a specific description of the reintegration of refugee children by the UNHCR¹²⁹ ¹³⁰. Furthermore, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

¹²⁷ Reintegration of child soldiers is part of the more encompassing DDR programme, that also includes the disarmament and demobilisation of combatants. The Paris Principles give the following definition. The reintegration of former child soldiers is: "...the process by which children transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation. Sustainable reintegration is achieved when the political, legal, economic and social conditions needed for children to maintain life, livelihood and dignity have been secured. This process aims to ensure that children can access their rights, including formal and non-formal education, family unity, dignified livelihoods and safety from harm." However, not all former child soldiers are linked to a DDR programme, because they did not receive any or the wrong information. Moreover, most armed groups will not recognise the presence of children in their militia. As a consequence, these children will not receive the official status of soldier and will not go through an official DDR programme. Unlike officially recognised child soldiers, they do not benefit from the psychological guidance, trainings or protection offered by these formal programmes.

¹²⁸ MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, pp. viii – 2, 9 – 10; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 4, 75 – 76; Paris Principles, 2007, p. 7.

¹²⁹ The UNHCR has a substantial role in the reintegration of displaced people. It adopted a policy to guarantee their successful return, known as the "4Rs approach". This strategy has four elements: Repatriation, Reintegration Rehabilitation and Reconstruction. UNHCR defines reintegration in this context as: "the progressive establishment of conditions which enable returnees and their communities to exercise their social, economic, civil, political and cultural rights, and on that basis to enjoy peaceful, productive and dignified lives". The UNHCR puts much emphasis on situation analysis, information gathering and planning of the reintegration. It works together with key partners on all levels, especially with a local basis. Reintegration of displaced people goes further than just re-attaching them to their

include provisions about the return and reintegration of IDPs (Section V).¹³¹ However, as the thesis deals with all children affected by an armed conflict, I will use the description of the ‘Interagency guidelines for developing reintegration programmes’¹³² which reaches out to all conflict-affected children.¹³³ Reintegration is:

*The process through which girls and boys, their families, and community members are enabled to restore or establish sustained family or social attachments and community links leading to mutual acceptance, which were either disrupted or prevented from developing due to conflict-related events.*¹³⁴

The drafters of these principles emphasise that reintegration means more than solely a return to the community or economic assimilation. It should include reuniting with friends and family, preventing more violations, promoting their full development and strengthening their physical, psychosocial and emotional well-being. In order to achieve this, a safe space has to be created to protect the children. This will benefit their reintegration in the short and long run.¹³⁵

The complex nature of the conflict asks for a holistic response that is multidimensional and targets all issues, while working on different levels and with a wide variety of actors. Inclusive programmes that target a diverse group of children with different traumas are more efficient and less labelling than specialised programmes. Furthermore, it can reduce the resentment of other people that cannot benefit from the same protection, as well as diminish the bitter and angry feelings

hometown. It is mainly eliminating the differences between them and the other members of the community, in terms of legal and socio-economic status.

¹³⁰ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme, 2008, pp. 1 – 15,

¹³¹ Mooney, 2007, pp. 59 – 60.

¹³² These guidelines were developed by a Working Group, which was established in 2006 during a West-African Reintegration Workshop of more than 20 child protection agencies. This document aims at addressing the gap between short-term and long-term reintegration strategies.

¹³³; West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, p. 3

¹³⁴ West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, p. 3.

¹³⁵ Maynard, 1997, p. 2; West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, pp. 3 – 4.

of the community towards the support given to former child soldiers. Consequently, a comprehensive approach will avoid tensions, as well as improve the protective cohesion in the community and the access to services.¹³⁶ However, this does not advocate a one-size-fits-all approach, which would fail to take into consideration the diverse needs and worries of children that have been affected by the armed conflict in different ways. On the other hand, it does not mean that programmes should make a rigid distinction between these categories of victims. Working on their reintegration together will stimulate interaction and mutual understanding.¹³⁷

Reintegration programmes should have links with key partners that can influence policies or components related to reintegration. Especially strong partnerships with economic agencies, such as the ILO or the World Bank, are definitely of great value for the socio-economic recovery.¹³⁸ When the efforts of all these partners are well coordinated and there is national, local and individual ownership, as well as community-based programmes and initiatives, the sustainability and the effectiveness of the reintegration process will be reinforced.¹³⁹

The monitoring of the reintegration programmes leaves a lot to be desired. It is, nevertheless, of great importance to know what does and does not work and to ensure that children are still on the right track. Evaluation, case follow-up and information-gathering should be included in every reintegration programme to ensure its effectiveness.¹⁴⁰ What is considered a successful reintegration, however, depends on the children, the family and the community, rather than on the organisations that offer the programme. Children can have different expectations of the process: some want to enjoy qualitative education, while others attach more

¹³⁶ MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, pp. 3 – 8; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 25 – 26; West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, p. 4; Wickham, 2009, p. 10.

¹³⁷ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, 2008, pp. 1 – 6, 12; Mooney, 2007, p. 58.

¹³⁸ West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, p. 9.

¹³⁹ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, 2008, pp. 2, 8 – 11; MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, p. 17; Maynard, 1997, pp. 5 – 6, 11; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 58 – 60, 85; Wickham, 2009, p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, pp. 40 – 41; West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, p. 10.

importance to social inclusion. Together with their family, they can determine what is in their best interest.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, pp. 2, 14; Nilsson, 2005, p. 25; Wickham, 2009, p. 15.

3.2. Support from family and community

Family reunification and reintegration in the community are considered indispensable for the reintegration process. Strong community ties and a good relationship with friends and family offer protection and can, therefore, keep children from engaging in antisocial behaviour. Children have confirmed that the unification with the family is one of the most important aspects of their reintegration. Therefore, family tracing is an activity that is commonly linked to reintegration programmes for children.¹⁴² Most of the time, the family members have also been affected by the traumatic experiences and have to become productive members of the society again. For those reasons, the family too should be targeted in the reintegration programme.¹⁴³

Families and communities should be prepared for the return of the children through, for example, information campaigns or meetings. Especially in the case of child soldiers, the confrontation can be extremely traumatic and can have a negative impact on the readiness of the community to welcome them back. Both sides feel fear for one another. While community members do not like the return of children that have committed atrocities against friends and family, the ex-combatants fear reprisals. Campaigns, joined workshops and gatherings can create a better understanding between both groups and even establish mutual acceptance.¹⁴⁴ Also the children should be ready for their comeback in order to make the transition less shocking. Rejection by family or community will make the process very challenging. Displaced children, for instance, encounter many difficulties when they return home: they lost feeling with the community and culture, they often have been deprived of their belongings and have to start from zero.¹⁴⁵ In this case, community can seek rapprochement by investing in housing reconstruction, accommodation and other materials for the children. This would be a first step to

¹⁴² MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, pp. 15 – 16; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 75 – 76; West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, p. 7.

¹⁴³ Nilsson, 2005, pp. 27 – 28.

¹⁴⁴ Nilsson, 2005, p. 56.

¹⁴⁵ MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, p. 15; Mooney, 2007, p. 77; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 75 – 76; Wickham, 2009, p. 8.

strengthening faith within the community. Without trust, the community will probably not function in a normal and effective way, because it will affect trade transactions, cooperation, decision making, mutual assistance and care for victims. Moreover, community members will not rely on each other for common services and will not invest in the future of the community. Re-establishing a sense of normality and confidence is definitely beneficial for the well-being of the society in the long run. Aside from tackling the mistrust within societies, it is also important to address taboos that lead to the marginalisation of children.¹⁴⁶

Children with war-related disabilities often encounter stigmatisation and marginalisation by others, because the latter lacks knowledge about the disabilities. Information and gatherings with these children would definitely change the perception of the others and would benefit the mutual understanding, respect and empathy towards these boys and girls. Awareness-raising can play an important role in disclosing interesting information. Sometimes, even parents encounter issues in fully understanding and accepting the disability that their child is suffering from.¹⁴⁷ Approaches that include parents' involvement have shown to be more effective.¹⁴⁸ It allows them to share experiences with other parents, to strengthen the ties with their children and to get a better understanding about the disability. Even when children have to stay into reintegration centres, it is essential that family visits are stimulated.¹⁴⁹

Finally, the negative impact of conflict on the social cohesion within the society also affects the traditional support mechanisms and welfare safety nets that can help with the psychosocial recovery. When the ties between family and child are restored, relatives can counterbalance the weakened structures by taking on a supportive role.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, 2008, pp. 10 – 11; Maynard, 1997, p. 8; West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ Ikelberg, Lechner, Ziegler & Zöllner, 2003, pp. 7, 16 – 22; Wickham, 2009, p. 12.

¹⁴⁸ Ikelberg, Lechner, Ziegler & Zöllner, 2003, pp. 16 – 22.

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁰ Maynard, 1997, p. 5.

3.3. Education, vocational and other skills training

Save the Children asked young victims what they consider as successful reintegration. They identified gaining the same opportunities and positive future prospects as other children as the main objective. This hopeful life path can be realised through programmes that emphasise education, vocational training and other skills.¹⁵¹ They are essential elements of a reintegration process. Education is a fundamental right of every child. Especially in times of armed conflict, many children are forced to stop school and, therefore, have a higher chance of being recruited and exploited or suffer from educational disadvantages, illiteracy or innumeracy. A reintegration programme that offers education and skills training addresses those issues and gives the child good prospects for a job and a healthy lifestyle.¹⁵² Moreover, school programmes can help children to keep up with the missed classes, to gain new knowledge, but also to learn life skills and craftsmanship, such as farming, carpenter, shoemaker, etc. which, additionally, benefit the community.¹⁵³ Schools also function as a safe space for children. It reduces the chances of recruitment, exploitation or becoming a member of criminal gangs and discloses valuable information about HIV/AIDS, landmines and other conflict-related risks.¹⁵⁴

Vocational skills training and economic opportunities are able to tackle one of the root causes of exploitation and conflict relapse. The achievements in the areas of family and community reintegration can be nullified by the harmful effects of poverty. To achieve long-term reintegration, the economic dimension cannot be overlooked.¹⁵⁵ The impact of qualitative vocational training is also noticeable in other areas. It boosts their self-confidence, they attain a higher status as well as more respect within the community and family and it gives a better chance for girls to become financially more independent. Income-generating activities can help

¹⁵¹ MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, pp. 10 – 12.

¹⁵² MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, p. 13; Mooney, 2007, pp. 70 – 75; Wickham, 2009, p. 11.

¹⁵³ West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, pp. 7 – 8.

¹⁵⁴ Mooney, 2007, pp. 70 – 75.

¹⁵⁵ MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, pp. 18 – 19.

children to find an internship, learn valuable skills and support adolescents in entering the labour market or starting their own business. This offers protection against recruitment or engaging in illegal activities. Also apprenticeships and on-the-job-trainings should be stimulated as they are considered more effective to learn skills, to build networks and to have a reference for future employers. Yet, the labour market is a very competitive place, especially during or after an armed conflict. Many children end up in exploitative circumstances, informal sector or are recruited (again) by armed forces. Reintegration programmes should supervise this and should offer trainings tailored to local demands, which is based on a thorough market analysis and does not neglect the rural economics.¹⁵⁶

The government has a considerable role to play in adjusting its youth employment policies and creating more jobs for young people. After all, conflict has a undermining impact on investment, trade and commerce, economic production and capital formation.¹⁵⁷ A short-term solution could be to employ conflict-affected youth in the reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure and community buildings. The willingness to work and to actively contribute to the society would facilitate the acceptance by its members, especially in case of former child soldiers or displaced children who are treated with mistrust and caution.¹⁵⁸

The economic dimension poses a significant challenge for child soldiers. They have to find an alternative way of living, but they mostly lack job skills, education or relevant experience. Furthermore, armed groups have also been perceived as valuable for children associated with it. Although these groups perpetrate violence and cause traumatic experiences, children are offered protection, remuneration, food and even prestige. Programmes have to offer beneficial substitutes in order to avoid re-recruitment or engagement in illegal activities.¹⁵⁹ Economic self-

¹⁵⁶ Ibidem, pp. 20 – 23; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 45 – 46; West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, p. 7; Wickham, 2009, p. 13.

¹⁵⁷ Maynard, 1997, p. 4; West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, p. 7.

¹⁵⁸ Nilsson, 2005, pp. 47 – 48, 57.

¹⁵⁹ Ibidem, pp. 20, 36 – 37.

sufficiency becomes one of the key conditions for a successful reintegration of child soldiers, because they attain more respect from their family and a higher status in the community.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, pp. 33 – 34; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 43 – 44.

3.4. Health and psychosocial recovery

Conflict causes many psychological traumas and disrupts access to health facilities. Yet, a good mental and physical well-being is necessary for the reintegration process, because it will empower children to take an active role in the community. Children affected by the conflict and even the community as a whole suffer from the ongoing violence and need healing. This is particularly challenging for the reintegration of child soldiers in a community that has been hurt because of them. In order to avoid escalating tensions, they should recognise each other's pain and support one another. Victims can come together in safe spaces, during ceremonies, in dance, art or music to start the individual and the communal healing process as well as to embrace forgiveness. Sharing experiences about the conflict can enhance mutual understanding and even trust.¹⁶¹

When traumas are left unaddressed, they can cause further distress, but can also make the reinsertion in the community and the building of new relationships more difficult. Furthermore, the anxiety and depressive feelings hinder the child in taking care for himself and becoming a more productive member of the family and society. Counselling, therapy and medication will help to overcome the psychological problems. However, conflict often renders mental health institutions inaccessible. Governments have the task to build the necessary capacity for this sector. Communities can contribute to the healing process as well. Priority should be given to local customs, traditions and cleansing rituals to accept child soldiers and other conflict-affected children back into the community. This can help the children to start the healing process, to embrace their new identity and to gain confidence.¹⁶²

Children that have attained a physical disability due to the conflict encounter new and different obstacles that require special attention. They often feel dependent, useless and lose their self-confidence and motivation. This can severely impact

¹⁶¹ Maynard, 1997, pp. 7 – 8; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 54 – 56; West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, p. 8; Wickham, 2009, p. 11.

¹⁶² Maynard, 1997, pp. 5, 11; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 59 – 60, 85.

their mental well-being and should not be overlooked. Furthermore, physical rehabilitation will play a more substantial role in their reintegration process. Sport and other recreational activities can help them to discover their abilities and limits, improve their motoric skills and learn how to function with a prosthesis.¹⁶³

Lastly, the traumatic experiences of girls during armed conflict can differ from boys', because they are more exposed to sexual violence. Desirably, reintegration programmes pay attention to their specific needs.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Ikelberg, Lechner, Ziegler & Zöllner, 2003, pp. 4 – 7.

¹⁶⁴ MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, pp. 24 – 26; Mooney, 2007, pp. 69 – 70; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 77 – 78.

3.5. Safety and protection

Ensuring the safety of conflict-affected children and a protective environment is essential for their mental well-being. A successful reintegration programme should, therefore, focus on the prevention of violence, recruitment, exploitation and other forms of victimhood. Moreover, programmes have to give the children enough life skills and techniques to cope with challenging situations. Psychosocial support and fun recreational activities will provide them protection and valuable friendships.¹⁶⁵ However, even after the conflict has ended, there is still ongoing insecurity and instability that endanger the reintegration of conflict-affected children. It can weaken their trust in the others, prevent their return to their homes, armed groups can abduct or recruit children and landmines still maim or kill children. Especially displaced children that are returning home run considerable safety risks. Their reintegration process starts with ensuring a safe passage and resettlement. According to some authors, positioning international and national security staff alongside the refugee routes can increase the security level. Furthermore, relapse into conflict can cause a disruption of the reintegration programmes, with obvious negative consequences for the children.¹⁶⁶

Safety does not only encompass the absence of violence, landmines or aggressive gangs, it also relates to having access to community services, justice, to one's own property and not suffering from severe famine or diseases.¹⁶⁷ Boys and girls that have been exploited, sexually or otherwise, need legal, financial and protective support from the government and local organisations to recover and to feel safe again. Most of the time, they are stigmatised, rejected by their family or community and fear revenge from the criminals for escaping. The reintegration of these children begins with providing a safe environment in temporary housings where they can access counselling, care and basic services.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, pp. 7 – 9.

¹⁶⁶ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, 2008, p. 9; MacVeigh, Maguire & Wedge, 2007, pp. 29 – 32, 43; Mooney, 2007, pp. 67 – 68; Nilsson, 2005, p. 13.

¹⁶⁷ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, 2008, p. 16; Maynard, 1997, p. 6.

¹⁶⁸ Wickham, 2009, pp. 8 – 10.

Governments have a substantial role to play in these processes. Investing in a security sector reform and fighting corruption and human rights violations within the police forces can improve the safety feelings among the civilians. It can create more favourable conditions for the reintegration of conflict-affected children.¹⁶⁹

In the case of ex-child soldiers, they have been taken away the means to protect themselves and their family. To prevent their return to the armed forces, they should be provided with enough protection and skills that help them to solve problems in a non-violent way. We cannot forget that the reintegration of ex-combatants is essential to establish peace and security. When children associated with armed groups are not successfully reintegrated, they often end up in criminal organisations or on the streets.¹⁷⁰

When the safety of children is finally guaranteed, the children will allow themselves to make mistakes, without having to deal with serious consequences, and to learn from those experiences. It will empower them, increase their self-confidence, give them valuable life skills and learn how to react on new challenging situations.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Maynard, 1997, pp. 6 – 7; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 41 – 42.

¹⁷⁰ Nilsson, 2005, pp. 17 – 19, 39 – 40.

¹⁷¹ Ikelberg, Lechner, Ziegler & Zöllner, 2003, p. 6.

3.6. Inclusion in decision making and re-establishing positive identity, social norms and routines

Often, children are left out of decision making and cannot ventilate their opinion or concerns about issues that affect them. It is a very frustrating feeling to know that they do not have any ownership over the outcome. Nevertheless, political assimilation of child soldiers and other conflict-affected children constitute an important part of the reintegration process, as it promotes the democratic dialogue with other citizens, stimulates the feeling of inclusion and allows the government to take measures.¹⁷² Therefore, local decision-making structures have to include all parties, because it creates a platform to clear out differences and tensions, but also to set common goals. Moreover, it stimulates intergroup communication and participation that are meaningful for the entire society.¹⁷³ Furthermore, taking the time to listen to children before the start of the reintegration programme can deliver interesting information about their fears, expectations and needs. Once this is clear, organisations can work to obviate these problems and to set up a programme customised to the child's wishes.¹⁷⁴

Armed conflict disturbs the normal lives of many children and submerges them in chaotic situations. Similarly, ethical principles, social norms and rules are disintegrated by the violent circumstances. They have to be restored, as they constitute the behavioural guidelines for children and the basis for a healthy interaction. Schools and sports practices are the ideal spaces to pass down new social norms, such as loyalty, honesty, accountability and responsibility, as well as to re-establish new routines and structure for the children. The same accounts for promoting a non-violent mentality.¹⁷⁵ In the beginning of this process, former child soldiers will struggle with their military identity. It is essential for the success of the process to discourage militaristic actions and asocial, aggressive behaviour, as well

¹⁷² Mooney, 2007, p. 64; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 20 – 26, 49 – 50.

¹⁷³ Maynard, 1997, pp. 9 – 10.

¹⁷⁴ Mooney, 2007, pp. 64 – 67; Wickham, 2009, pp. 15 – 16.

¹⁷⁵ Maynard, 1997, pp. 5 – 9; Nilsson, 2005, pp. 58, 77; West Africa Reintegration Working Group, 2007, p. 7.

as to stimulate peaceful conflict-resolution skills and non-violence.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, as a soldier, the children were used to receiving recognition and prestige from their superiors and supporters. The transition to picking up a normal role in society can be difficult for some youngsters. Programmes should have an eye for that and teach those children to accept this. After all, having a positive identity again is vital for a successful progress of their reintegration.¹⁷⁷

Children that have become victim of conflict-related violence, such as SGBV or landmines, suffer from low self-esteem, low sense of self-worth and a lack of motivation. These boys and girls should be empowered through, for example, education, vocational skills training support of the community and therapy in the form of arts or sports in order to rebuild a positive identity and to confidently overcome the obstacles they might encounter in the future.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 8.

¹⁷⁷ Nilsson, 2005, p. 51 – 53.

¹⁷⁸ Ikelberg, Lechner, Ziegler & Zöllner, 2003, pp. 4, 13; Wickham, 2009, pp. 11 – 12.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed more thoroughly the right to the reintegration of children that have been affected by armed conflict, as protected by Article 39 CRC. A successful reintegration programme should offer a comprehensive answer to the complexity of conflict-related issues,. This requires a coordinated action of all key partners on the various levels. Community-based initiatives have proven to be more sustainable and effective. Moreover, many children attach great importance to the acceptance by family and community members. A strong cohesion benefits the reintegration in many ways: it fights exclusion and bad influences as well as supports the psychosocial recovery. Conflict often interrupts the education and economic development of children. Reintegration programmes should remedy the lost classes by providing valuable information and life-skills. This can reduce the chances of re-recruitment, exploitation or delinquency. For the same reasons, vocational skills training, investing in youth employment and apprenticeships need to be included in these programmes. Furthermore, a good mental health is indispensable, because it gives the children more self-confidence, energy and empowerment to take an active role in the community. Time should be invested in counselling and therapy to initiate the healing process. This is especially the case for children that have attained a physical disability during the war. Overall, the reintegration process has to take place in a secure environment, where children are safe and where they are empowered to rebuild their identity, to have more self-esteem and to pick up an ethical way of living. Finally, children should have the chance to give their opinion about issues that are important to them, not only on a political or local level, but also related to the programme. Even though the elements discussed in this chapter contribute to its effectiveness, a reintegration process is successful when the child's objectives, wishes and needs are fulfilled.

CHAPTER 4: Sport as a tool for reintegration

This chapter aims at answering the central research question of this thesis: “How can sport be used as a tool for the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict?” In the past decade, sport has found its way into processes of development and peacebuilding. Yet, literature on the topic is still rather scarce. There is particularly a lack of research that monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of sports programmes. Many international organisations, such as the UN and the International Olympic Committee, are confident about the power of sport as a means of social change.¹⁷⁹

This chapter is divided into seven subsections. The first subsection will deal with legal instruments that are of interest for this topic. The four subsequent subsections will discuss the reasons why sport can contribute to the reintegration of children affected by conflict. The following four areas that I have identified during my literature study and field work will be covered in these sections: general benefits of sport, sport as a safe space, sport as an inclusive space for dialogue and reconnecting and finally, sport as a classroom for learning skills. Nevertheless, we cannot forget that sport is often associated with violence, hooliganism, intolerance, strong competitive feelings and even doping and ‘unfair’ play.¹⁸⁰ In subsection six, the limitations and challenges of sport will be discussed. In the seventh and final subsection, I will briefly elaborate on two good practices in Colombia.

¹⁷⁹ Cárdenas, 2013, p. 3; Coalter, 2010, p. 311; Dyck, 2011, p. 397; SDP IWG, 2008, p. 206.

¹⁸⁰ Cárdenas, 2013, p. 3.

4.1. Legal framework

Sport is defined by the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace as “*all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organized or competitive sport, and indigenous sports and games.*”¹⁸¹ The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights already protected the right to leisure in Article 24. In 1978, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) explicitly recognised sport as a fundamental right in Article 1 of the Charter of Physical Education and Sport.¹⁸² Furthermore, the participation of children in sport is protected in Article 31 CRC:

States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. (...)

Other specialised Conventions, such as The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and CEDAW, also encourage State Parties to ensure the right to sport for children with disabilities and girls.¹⁸³ However, armed conflict often interrupts the enjoyment of this right. State Parties have the responsibility to take measures in order to safeguard sport activities for children, even in times of war. After all, guaranteeing the possibility to sport and play is important in realising other rights, such as physical and mental health, cultural life, development and well-being.¹⁸⁴

The international community recognises sport as a powerful tool with valuable features that can contribute to reinforcing development, building peace and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The UN General Assembly adopted some resolutions concerning “Sports as a Means to Promote Health, Development

¹⁸¹ SDP IWG, 2008, p. 5.

¹⁸² Ravizza, 2008, p. 2; SDP IWG, 2008, pp. 5 – 7.

¹⁸³ Article 30 CRPD and Article 10(g) and Article 13(c) CEDAW.

¹⁸⁴ Supra

and Peace” and reaffirmed children’s right to sport in the 2002 Resolution “A World Fit for Children”. Moreover, the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (SDP IWG)¹⁸⁵ believes that sport is also beneficial for victims of conflict, displaced communities, social integration, child soldiers, trauma relief, persons with disabilities and fighting stigmatisation, which are, in other words, the consequences that children suffer from during armed conflict¹⁸⁶. Lastly, the Cape Town Principles and Best Practices and the Paris Principles confirm the power of sport for child soldiers by promoting its use in reintegration programmes.¹⁸⁷ In the next subchapters, I will discuss various valuable characteristics of sport that explain how it can contribute to reintegration.

¹⁸⁵ Established in 2004, it was mandated to make policy recommendations and to promote the adoption of Sport for Development and Peace into national and international programmes. The recommendations were gathered in the report “Harnessing the Power of Sport for Development and Peace: Recommendations to Governments”. In 2008, the SDP IWG was given a new mandate and was placed under the control of the Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace (established in 2001). It now focusses on policy, awareness-raising and monitoring.

¹⁸⁶ See Chapter 2: The Impact of Conflict on Children.

¹⁸⁷ Ravizza, 2008, pp. 2 – 3; SDP IWG, 2008, pp. II – VIII, 85.

4.2. General benefits of sport

The features of sport that can contribute to the reintegration of conflict-affected children will be divided over four chapters. In this subsection, some general benefits will be discussed.

First of all, sport is played everywhere in the world, it has no boundaries. Its universality is one of the main assets, because it does not stop at political, social, geographic, cultural or ideological borders. Sport can bring together millions of people from various backgrounds, ethnicities and social status. It is the place to be to meet people from other ethnic communities, as sport does not care about social differences.¹⁸⁸

Sport also helps to enjoy a good physical and mental health. It has a positive impact on the development and well-being of children and can boost their self-esteem. It is an ideal stress relief and helps to decrease anxiety.¹⁸⁹

Finally, many studies have also shown that children who play sport are less likely to show antisocial behaviour or engage in delinquency. A Sport for Development and Peace programme in Medellin, Colombia, even resulted in a decrease of criminal activities in the city, because sport gave the adolescents an alternative for violence and gang memberships. As an example, the research of Christopher Dyck among ex-child combatants in DDR programmes working with sports found that violence rates between the boys dropped.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Cárdenas, 2013, pp. 6 – 7; Dorokhina, Hosta & van Sterkenburg, 2011, p. 12.

¹⁸⁹ Cárdenas, 2013, p.7; Dyck, 2011, p. 404; SDP IWG, 2008, p. 212.

¹⁹⁰ Cárdenas, 2013, pp. 7 – 8; Dyck, 2011, p. 402; SDP IWG, 2008, p. 99

4.3. Sport as a safe space

Conflict snatches away a child's opportunity to grow up in a safe environment and to have a normal childhood and development. It submerges them in a world of chaos, violence and grief. Sport has the ability to give these children a feeling of normality and safety. Sport provides a positive space where children can escape their worries and pain.¹⁹¹ The study of the SDP IWG shows the therapeutic effect of sports on traumas and depressions, which are both issues many conflict-affected children are coping with.¹⁹² Interviews with various children in reintegration programmes testified that playing football made them happy and relaxed, sport calms them down and makes them forget their fears and past experiences. It also allows to make mistakes and to learn valuable lessons from those experiences. Moreover, it takes their mind of the psychological trauma and removes them from a stressful situation. Having a positive and relaxed state of mind is an essential step in the reintegration process.¹⁹³

The regular sports practices are also a way for the children to gain structure and stability again. Obviously, sport cannot bring back everything the children have lost during the armed conflict, but it can help to pick up their lives and offer a new, positive basis with room for joy and friendships.¹⁹⁴ For socially disadvantaged children, such as refugees, IDPs or children with conflict-related disabilities, sport can empower them and boost their self-confidence. Reintegration will be facilitated when the child opens up to others and believes in his or hers own abilities again.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Cárdenas, 2013, p. 8.

¹⁹² SDP IWG, 2008, pp. 51 – 56.

¹⁹³ Dyck, 2011, pp. 402 – 408; Ikelberg, Lechner, Ziegler & Zöllner, 2003, p. 6; Ravizza, 2008, pp. 3 – 7; SDP IWG, 2008, pp. 51 – 56, 102, 221.

¹⁹⁴ SDP IWG, 2008, pp. 102 – 104.

¹⁹⁵ Dorokhina, Hosta & van Sterkenburg, 2011, p. 13; SDP IWG, 2008, pp. 51 – 56.

4.4. Sport as an inclusive space for dialogue and reconnecting

Sport is considered an effective tool to connect children and communities as well as to reinforce the social cohesion in the communities affected by armed conflict. Especially team sports bring many children together and allow them to make friends, strong bonds and to create a social network. Teams that include children from diverse or even rivalry ethnic communities learn how to cooperate and build relationships.¹⁹⁶ This quality of establishing social inclusion and bridging children from various backgrounds is important for the reintegration of ex-child soldiers, abducted children, refugee and internally displaced children and children with war-related disabilities. Displaced children that return to their hometowns have difficulties reintegrating. Sport can break down the barriers that exist between the children and the community members and act as a re-connector between both groups.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, they are often isolated and discriminated against during their displacement. Participating in sport activities can stimulate dialogue with the original community members, create a common understanding and can build social capital. These strong ties are key in tackling social exclusion and, thus, in achieving reintegration.¹⁹⁸

In general, sport can sometimes mend broken communities, because it gives the civilians the opportunity to come together, socialise and strengthen the ties. It can even contribute to the re-establishment of a community identity. Children in a sports team, for example, often describe the feeling of having a shared identity and label themselves as a team, a family. The differences between the children seem to be bridged through playing sports, so it is a good way to connect a diversity of people and create unity.¹⁹⁹

As mentioned before, citizens have difficulties accepting former child soldiers back

¹⁹⁶ Cárdenas, 2013, pp. 7 – 9; Dorokhina, Hosta & van Sterkenburg, 2011, pp. 9 – 14.

¹⁹⁷ Dyck, 2011, p. 399; Ravizza, 2008, p. 5; SDP IWG, 2008, pp. 211 – 214.

¹⁹⁸ Ravizza, 2008, p. 7; SDP IWG, 2008, pp. 211 – 216.

¹⁹⁹ Cárdenas, 2013, p. 9; Dorokhina, Hosta & van Sterkenburg, 2011, p. 13; SDP IWG, 2008, pp. 207 – 225.

in their community. Both groups treat the other with suspicion. Therefore, ex-child soldiers can become isolated, are excluded from community activities and are heavily stigmatised. The social inclusion of these children is, nevertheless, an essential aspect of their reintegration process. Organising sportive games between the DDR youth and the community members will encourage interactions, the rebuilding of social networks and can even result in tolerance, acceptance and coexistence.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, playing in a sports team can stimulate an alternative, peaceful lifestyle, which helps to decrease their heightened chance of re-recruitment.²⁰¹

For child victims of the conflict, the engagement of their family and the entire community in the reintegration process is of great value. Sport can help these adults to develop ties with the children and their recovery process.²⁰² Girls and boys that have become the victim of SGBV are experiencing many psychological issues. Sport activities can help to rebuild trust in others, to bring victims together to relax and to talk, but most of all to offer a safe space.²⁰³ Lastly, children that suffer from a conflict-related disability often feel isolated and do not believe in their own potential. Sport can be a remedy, because it emphasises the abilities of the child rather than the disability. It allows them to discover their capabilities and their limits, as well as to learn how they can be more independent from relatives. This will not only give the child more confidence in his or her own competences, but it will also change the perception of the community about disabilities. They will empathise, gain more knowledge and appreciation. It will empower the children, reduce the stigma and battle the various forms of exclusion.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Dyck, 2011, pp. 402 – 406; SDP IWG, 2008, pp. 103.

²⁰¹ Ibidem, pp. 217 – 218.

²⁰² Dorokhina, Hosta & van Sterkenburg, 2011, p. 16.

²⁰³ Swiss Academy for Development, n.d., para. 4 – 7.

²⁰⁴ Ikelberg, Lechner, Ziegler & Zöllner, 2003, pp.6 – 7 17; SDP IWG, 2008, pp. 171 – 184.

4.5. Sport as a classroom for learning skills

Sport as a tool has to benefit the primary objective of reintegration, rather than focussing on the physical side. It is therefore important that coaches teach valuable skills to the children through sport. Since reintegration includes a substantial community aspect, a significant role is reserved for social skills, such as teamwork, cooperation, respect and tolerance. Also discipline, decision-making skills, responsibility and abiding by the rules are qualities that are taught through sport and that will contribute to a successful reintegration process in the long term. Therefore, the sports field can be a place where values and skills are exchanged and the adoption of respectful attitudes and ethics are stimulated.²⁰⁵

For ex-child combatants, a successful reintegration implies adopting an alternative, non-violent livelihood and finding a sustainable job. However, in the beginning these children will still hold on to their military identity. It is essential that they let this go and start to create a new identity. Sport coaches have a vital role in discouraging the militarised skills and transferring new social and socioeconomic skills in a playful way. Finally, sport can help the community to see these children in a different way and to accept them as new people independent from their military past, which is a crucial step in the reintegration process.²⁰⁶

Lastly, talented coaches and famous, skilled athletes have an exemplary function and are good role models for the children. They empower the children to take good decisions, to stay on the right path and to apply the skills that they have learned through sport on their reintegration process. In the case of child orphans or separated children, the coaches are of particular importance. They are the inspiration of the children, the people they look up to and that will offer them protection and guidance. The coaches are the first community members willing to accept the children and to carry their burden of pain and loss with them.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Cárdenas, 2013, p. 7; Ravizza, 2008, pp. 5 – 8; SDP IWG, 2008, p. 95.

²⁰⁶ Dyck, 2011, pp. 400 – 404; SDP IWG, 2008, p. 228.

²⁰⁷ SDP IWG, 2008, pp. 81 – 97, 217.

4.6. Limitations and challenges

Previous subchapters have shown the potential of sport in contributing to reintegration processes. However, we cannot overestimate its power. Sport is by no means a magic tool, it is merely a component. In order to achieve successful reintegration, it has to be complemented by other tools, such as education, vocational trainings and psychosocial treatment. Child victims deal with a complex variety of personal problems and traumas. Sport cannot focus on each of these issues, as it is not a tailor-made tool. Moreover, the scholar Fred Coalter argues that only some participants benefit from some types of sports. Its result will not only differ depending on the individual and the sport, but the entire context should be taken into account. Professional and high-performance sport activities are deemed less suitable, because their primary goal is not related to reintegration. In summary, the other tools, especially education, cannot be neglected or merely replaced by sports. A holistic and multidimensional approach is definitely necessary.²⁰⁸

It cannot be denied that sport is linked with strong competition and even violent, aggressive behaviour. Instead of bridging communities and social groups, they can be driven further apart. Interethnic hostility and violence can reach a peak when two teams from different ethnic groups have to compete. In the heat of the game, players can become very violent towards their opponents or the referee, especially when it involves a sport with much physical contact.²⁰⁹ In DDR camps, coaches have encountered violent eruptions and the use of military tactics during the sport programmes with child soldiers. It is important to react on this situation, talk to the children and teach them the value of respect, fair play and abiding by the rules.²¹⁰

Sport can also provoke nationalistic feelings, intolerance, sexism and racism. Although previous subchapters argued the opposite, sport can also be a space where social discrimination, exclusion and ethnic differences are intensified. Firstly, some

²⁰⁸ Cárdenas, 2013, pp. 3, 13 – 14; Coalter, 2010, p. 311; Dorokhina, Hosta & van Sterkenburg, 2011, pp. 9 – 17; Dyck, 2011, pp. 403 – 410; Ravizza, 2008, p. 8; SDP IWG, 2008, p. 13.

²⁰⁹ Dorokhina, Hosta & van Sterkenburg, 2011, pp. 14 – 15.

²¹⁰ Dyck, 2011, p. 404.

researchers argue that the contacts during sport are not as strong as believed and will not lead to friendships, strong networks or multicultural acceptance. These scholars also state that sport foster the separate ethnic identities rather than creating a new inclusive identity.²¹¹ Moreover, sport teams mainly include and attract members of the same background, which makes it more difficult to build relations with other children.²¹²

Reintegration projects that use sport as a tool should mix the teams in terms of gender and age. This can avoid creating an intergenerational gap and will stimulate gender equality and respect for the other sex. Mainly reintegration programmes of child soldiers can encounter this issue, as boys and girls ex-combatants are rarely mixed. In this manner, attitudes of male dominance and disrespectful behaviour towards girls, as a continuation of committed SGBV, can be reinforced.²¹³

In general, coaches play a significant role in the possible contributions of sport to the reintegration process. It is, therefore, necessary that the coaches receive training and understand the process of reintegration and the role of sport. They have a valuable guiding role and have to intervene in the cases where successful reintegration is put at risk, for example when children do not listen to the rules, show aggressive behaviour or give up. Foremost, coaches have to teach the children life skills that will benefit their reintegration process, such as communication, networking, cooperation, tolerance, self-esteem and discipline. These sport initiatives should primarily be driven by reintegration goals, while the sportive, physical side is of secondary importance. Providing qualitative training to coaches is a challenge that undeniably deserves the necessary attention, because, if not, sport will have little or no impact.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Cárdenas, 2013, p. 3; Dorokhina, Hosta & van Sterkenburg, 2011, pp. 12 – 16.

²¹² Ibidem. Cárdenas, 2013

²¹³ Dyck, 2011, pp. 408 – 409.

²¹⁴ Cárdenas, 2013, p. 14; Dyck, 2011, pp. 404 – 405; Ravizza, 2008, p. 7; SDP IWG, 2008, p. 13.

4.7. Good practices: *Golombiao* and *Colombianitos*

In previous subchapters, the advantages and challenges of sport as a tool for reintegration were discussed. In this section, I will briefly discuss two good practices in order to illustrate for the readers how an reintegration programme that uses sport looks like.²¹⁵ As my case study will focus on Colombia, I choose to elaborate on two initiatives that I have visited during my field trip in Colombia. One is a government programme, called ‘*El Golombiao, El Juego de la Paz*’ and the other one is the non-profit organisation ‘*Colombianitos*’. Both focus on children in marginalised areas, displaced communities, victims of the armed conflict or vulnerable to recruitment or delinquency.²¹⁶

4.7.1. *El Golombiao, El Juego de la Paz*²¹⁷

El Golombiao was founded in 2003 by a coalition of international agencies and government institutions. It is mainly managed by the Presidential Colombia *Joven* Programme, in cooperation with the German Technical Cooperation Agency and UNICEF. On the local level, *Golombiao* has strategic partnerships with various social actors, ranging from public and private sectors to international organisations and community initiatives led by young people. In this way, the strategy truly gains foothold in the local communities. Over more than 60 000 children and adolescents have participated in this strategy and various municipalities have promoted it by adopting the strategy in their youth policies. This also allows for the neighbourhoods to focus on the local problems and to adapt the strategy accordingly. Nowadays, projects are running in over more than half of the departments in Colombia. The programme is open for everyone interested in learning about peace, coexistence and promoting social integration, no matter the age, sex or social status. The strategy of *Golombiao* is

²¹⁵ I would also like to mention the work of Professor Dean M. Ravizza who did incredible research on the impact of sports on the reintegration of former child soldiers in Northern Uganda. The space limits does not allow me to elaborate on his analyses. For the readers that are interested in more good practices, I would like to refer to his works.

²¹⁶ Programa Presidencial Colombia Joven & UNICEF, n.d., p. 6.

²¹⁷ I would like to thank Juan Carlos Reyes Cañón, the director of the Dirección del Sistema Nacional de Juventud for giving me an interesting explanation about the programme and for providing me with very helpful documents.

frequently used to prevent youth delinquency, the recruitment of children in the armed groups, to promote reintegration of victims of the armed conflict and displaced communities, such as in Putumayo or the Awá population in Nariño.²¹⁸

The methodology of *Golombiao* is based on seven principles that should be respected at all times: equality, non-discrimination, active participation, care for oneself and for the others, non-violence, freedom of expression and care for the environment.²¹⁹ Both teams are always mixed and everyone has to play during the game. Instead of referees, there are Game Advisers, who will guide the game. Before the game starts, the teams meet in a common space where they adopt coexistence agreements. This is called ‘Moment 1’. The second one is the game itself in which the players have to comply with the agreed rules. Furthermore, the first goal of each period for both teams should be made by a girl. Afterwards, boys and girls have to make the goals alternately. ‘Moment 3’ is characterised by an evaluation and reflection of the game and the agreements. Everyone together will decide who the winner is, depending on who followed the coexistence agreements the best. Football is the most popular sport, but this strategy can be adjusted to any team sport. Before and after the game, there are additional activities which allow for the players and the supporters to come together, interact and strengthen the social cohesion between community members.²²⁰

The benefits of *Golombiao* for the reintegration of conflict-affected children are obvious. First of all, children and the spectators, mostly family and adult community members, learn the values of peaceful coexistence, respect, tolerance and the power of dialogue. These skills and values are not only directly significant for being welcomed again in the community, but also in the long term they are valuable to take good decisions and to find a job more successfully. Secondly, the emphasis on gender equality can be of great importance for the

²¹⁸ Programa Presidencial Colombia Joven & UNICEF, n.d., pp. 3 – 7.

²¹⁹ Southey, 2011, p. 34.

²²⁰ Programa Presidencial Colombia Joven & UNICEF, n.d., p. 2; Southey, 2011, pp. 34 – 35.

recovery of girls that have been the victim of SGBV and to change the attitudes of boys and men towards the other sex and vice versa. Furthermore, it is a way to bring parents and their children closer together in a safe space, because family members are invited to join the activities or to support their children. Lastly, the mixed teams and coexistence principles definitely promote the cohesion in the community and try to fight the issue of exclusion of, for example, displaced people or children with disabilities.²²¹

4.7.2. *Colombianitos*²²²

This foundation was established in 2001 with the aim to improve the well-being of underprivileged, vulnerable children and their communities in Colombia. The organisation has programmes in eight very vulnerable neighbourhoods and reaches directly 4000 children, but indirectly over more than 15000 people. In order to teach life skills and reach the values of respect, tolerance and honesty, it combines education with community programmes such as sports, music and other recreational activities. The projects primarily focus on children in vulnerable areas, who have been displaced because of the conflict or are continuously exposed to the risk of violence, recruitment, drugs, exploitation and street gangs. Furthermore, they have a separate programme on the rehabilitation of children that have been maimed by landmines. The main objectives are to keep the children away from these dangerous situations, to give them a qualitative education and skills training as well as to provide them with structure and friendships. In case of the children with disabilities, psychological recovery, physical therapy, getting used to the prostheses and reintegration are put in the foreground.²²³

In their sport activities, *Colombianitos* applies the ‘Right to Play’-methodology. In the beginning of the practice, the coach will convey some valuable messages,

²²¹ Programa Presidencial Colombia Joven & UNICEF, n.d., p. 6.

²²² I would like to thank the organisation of *Colombianitos* for introducing me to their methodology and for providing me with valuable information.

²²³ Colombianitos, n.d., para. 1 – 5.

while after the practice, he or she will stimulate the children to think about what they have learned. The process has three steps: reflect, connect and apply. In the first step, the children reflect on the past practice, share their views and feelings and make them conscious about the values they have learned. In the next phase of connecting, the child has to consider how this experience matches or fit in previous experiences and learned skills. Lastly, the child has to think about how he or she can apply the values and skills in real life and how it can benefit themselves and the community. Although *Colombianitos* seems to focus on increasing confidence, self-esteem and motivation as well as on teaching life skills, it also devotes attention to creating support from the family and community and addressing stigma and discrimination. The benefits are thus similar to the previous discussed project.²²⁴

²²⁴ Right to Play, n.d., pp. 1 – 2.

Conclusion

Sport as a fundamental right has been protected in numerous legal instruments, such as the CRC, CRPD CEDAW and the UNESCO Charter of Physical Education and Sport. Many international organisations strongly believe in the power of sport to build peace and establish social integration. The Cape Town and Paris Principles even promote the use of sport in reintegration programmes for former child soldiers. Sport has characteristics that are valuable for the reintegration of conflict-affected children. First of all, sport provides a safe space where children can take their minds off the conflict-related traumas and stress and where their happiness and confidence is boosted. Furthermore, it is a place where children from different ethnicities can meet, build relationships, tolerance and acceptance. It is also a way to strengthen the ties with community members and to fight social exclusion and stigmatisation, which many conflict-affected children suffer from. Lastly, sport can function as a classroom where valuable life skills can be learned. Social skills, such as teamwork and respect, but also socioeconomic and vocational skills, discipline and decision-making skills are stimulated during sport and can contribute to the reintegration process in the short and long run. The qualified coaches have an important role to play in discouraging antisocial behaviour and teaching life skills. However, we have to keep in mind that sport is not a magic tool, that it is only one of the instruments that can help in reintegrating children. The competitive and physical side of sport can result in hostility and intolerance and may intensify discrimination and exclusion, which will definitely not advance the reintegration. These are challenges that have to be taken into account when using sport as a tool for reintegrating children affected by armed conflict.

CHAPTER 5: Case study of Colombia

Colombia has known a long history of colonisation: since the fifteenth century, it has been under Spanish rule. It was not until the 20th of July 1810 that the country finally gained its independence²²⁵. In the late 1940s, the country stumbled into a civil war that has become one of the longest internal conflicts in the world and is still ongoing to date.²²⁶ Nevertheless, the Republic of Colombia is nowadays on the rise and has become the third largest economy in Latin-America, after Brazil and Mexico.²²⁷ Moreover, the poverty decreased from nearly 50 per cent in 2002 to 34 per cent in 2011.²²⁸ Demographically, the Colombian population is fairly young: almost one third of an estimated 48 million people are youngsters between 10 and 24 years old and the median age is 28,9. In 2011, it was estimated that more than 75% of the population lived in urban areas. The urbanisation rates of Colombia were one of the highest in the continent.²²⁹ Currently, the country is led by President Juan Manuel Santos of the Social Party of National Unity, who was re-elected in May 2014. His main election promise was to proceed with and complete the peace talks.²³⁰

There are various reasons to choose Colombia as a case study for this thesis about sport as a possible tool for the reintegration of conflict-affected children. First of all, as mentioned before, Colombia has a large proportion of young people.²³¹ As we will see in subchapter 2, children have been overly affected by the Colombian conflict. This brings us to the next argument. The peace process in Colombia is in full swing and a successful ending of the negotiations seems closer than ever. Inevitably, the parties will have to address the issues of DDR, transitional justice and reparations for victims. Although the peace agenda does not contain any

²²⁵ This declaration of independence was officially recognised in 1819.

²²⁶ Central Intelligence Agency US, 2015, para. 1 – 4.

²²⁷ Chan, 2015, para. 2 – 12, 40.

²²⁸ Ibidem, para. 5 – 6.

²²⁹ Central Intelligence Agency US, 2015, para. 3; Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, 2015; Population Reference Bureau, 2013, p. 8

²³⁰ BBC, 2014, para. 1 – 3; Central Intelligence Agency US, 2015, para. 4.

²³¹ Ibidem, p. 8

specific reference to children affected by the conflict, the negotiators have put the abovementioned issues on the agenda.²³² Moreover, President Santos urged the FARC to stop recruiting children and to send them back home to initiate the reintegration process.²³³ Due to the long history of the conflict, an enormous amount of children have been affected and need to benefit from reintegration programmes. The outcome of this study can offer a modest contribution to the improvement of these processes by determining the possible role of sports. Lastly, the recent remarkable results of the country in major sport events, such as the 2012 Summer Olympic Games²³⁴ or the 2014 FIFA World Cup²³⁵, have boosted Colombia's willingness to invest in sport programmes and policies.²³⁶ During the World Cup, images from Colombia of an euphoric mass travelled the world, just a couple of hours after the very tense presidential elections. The unity that sport and especially football creates among the Colombians is remarkable.²³⁷ The abovementioned arguments make the choice for Colombia as a case study an obvious for me.

We have a lot of issues in which we disagree, but sports, specifically football in Colombia, is one of the things we can agree on. Nothing has united more this country than our national selection, our football team.

- Juan Carlos Reyes Cañón,

Director of the Dirección del Sistema Nacional de Juventud²³⁸

This chapter will be divided in 3 subchapters. The first subchapter will explain the history of the Colombian conflict and the complexity of actors involved. In the second, I will highlight some remarkable consequences of the conflict for

²³² Vulliamy, 2015, para. 26.

²³³ Xinhua, 2015, para. 1 – 6.

²³⁴ Colombia won eight medals (one gold, three silver and 4 bronze) in London 2012, which are six medals more than during the Olympic Games of 2008 in Beijing.

²³⁵ The Colombian football team lost in the quarter finals against Brazil. Now, the team is ranked fourth in the FIFA ranking.

²³⁶ BBC, 2012; Cárdenas, 2013, p. 28; UEFA, 2014.

²³⁷ Alarcón, 2014, para. 1 – 3.

²³⁸ Interview conducted in English.

Colombian children, discuss statistics and the legislative actions by the government. In the third and last subchapter, I will analyse the interviews of my field study and present the results.

5.1. History of the Colombian Conflict

In Colombia, the longest internal conflict of the world is taking place, shattering the lives of many Colombian families and children. However, five decades after the beginning of the war the end seems closer than ever.²³⁹ Currently, the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have gathered in Havana, Cuba, to negotiate a peace agreement.²⁴⁰ Since the start of the peace talks in November 2012, a consensus has been reached on three broad issues and recently, a first step was taken in the area of the rights of victims with the establishment of a “Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition”.²⁴¹ First of all, both parties recognised the need for rural and land reforms, which entails the development of these areas by building infrastructure, guaranteeing the access to land for poor farmers and improving their technical capacity. Furthermore, the government agreed that a successful end of the peace talks will lead to the participation of the FARC in the Colombian politics and reconstruction process. Lastly, the two parties will engage in tackling the illegal drug business, one of the main income sources of the FARC, and will stimulate legal alternatives for farmers that are now stuck in the narco economy.²⁴² Two items are still the subject of heavy debates and disagreements: ceasefire and decommission on the one hand and transitional justice and the rights of victims on the other hand.²⁴³ Although significant improvements were made on the matter of a bilateral ceasefire²⁴⁴, the attacks of the FARC in Cauca on the fifteenth of April 2015, which killed eleven government soldiers and two guerrillas and wounded seventeen state militaries, led to a major setback. President Juan Manuel Santos reacted by resuming suspended bomb attacks on FARC targets.²⁴⁵ Furthermore, the

²³⁹ Vulliamy, 2015, para. 1 – 3.

²⁴⁰ BBC, 2015, para. 1 – 2.

²⁴¹ Ibidem, para. 19 – 25; Presidencia de la Republica., 2015, para. 1 – 8.

²⁴² BBC, 2015, para. 19 – 25; Vulliamy, 2015, para. 22 – 29.

²⁴³ Ibidem, para. 26.

²⁴⁴ The FARC had declared a unilateral ceasefire in December. Although the government showed herself very reluctant from the beginning of the negotiations to stop targeting the FARC units, the president announced in March 2015 the suspension of air strikes. Earlier ceasefires were abused by the guerrillas to regroup and plan attacks.

²⁴⁵ BBC, 2015, para. 29 – 36; Vulliamy, 2015, para. 26; Washington Office on Latin America, 2015, para. 1 – 5.

President stated that a bilateral ceasefire will most likely not be implemented as long as the peace negotiations are taking place.²⁴⁶ The absence of a truce, however, will definitely impede the transition process, as it will cause trust issues and more attacks will plunge the negotiations into a crisis.²⁴⁷ For the last item on the peace agenda, a significant improvement has been made with the establishment of the Commission. However, the government recognises that this is not enough and that the negotiations will discuss other measures for transitional justice and the rights of victims. All options for transitional justice should be considered.²⁴⁸ We have to bear in mind that a successful transition to peace is a delicate undertaking and that previous attempts have failed, due to the complexity and the long history of this conflict as I will explain in the next paragraph.²⁴⁹

To give a full picture of the history of the Colombian conflict, we have to go back to the official independence of the country²⁵⁰ in 1819. A two-party democratic system was established, which makes Colombia one of the strongest democratic traditions in the continent.²⁵¹ However, both parties, the Liberals and Conservatives, were not reluctant to fight each other violently in order to gain political control. In 1948, the assassination of Liberal presidential candidate, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, erupted into riots, better known as the *bogotazo*, and eventually into a deadly civil war, the so-called “*violencia*”, which officially ended in 1958 with the establishment of a National Front, but lingered on due to regular violent insurgencies.²⁵² During the period of the National Front until 1974, both parties agreed that they would govern in turn and share power. On the one hand, this led to less confrontations between Liberals and Conservatives. On the other hand, some groups like the Communists felt ignored and believed that this coalition lacked the

²⁴⁶ Dancis, 2015, para. 1 – 5.

²⁴⁷ Washington Office on Latin America, 2015, para. 3.

²⁴⁸ BBC, 2015, para. 41 – 45; Presidencia de la Republica., 2015, para. 1 – 5; Vulliamy, 2015, para. 26 – 29.

²⁴⁹ Beitel, 2015, pp. 14 – 15.

²⁵⁰ Republic of Greater Colombia was the name given to the territory that included nowadays Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela.

²⁵¹ Salamanca, 2008, p. 18; Shingleton, 2001, p. 255.

²⁵² Henderson, 2015, pp. 93 – 94; Salamanca, 2008, pp. 18 – 21; Vulliamy, 2015, para. 10 – 11.

courage to tackle some pressing problems, like poverty and rural reforms. Armed communist fractions established themselves in more isolated areas of Colombia. All this occurred in the atmosphere of the Cold War.²⁵³ It should therefore not be surprising that the United States of America offered substantial military and economic aid to Colombia to battle those recalcitrant Communist fractions, because they were a threat for the U.S. interests in the country. After the Cold War, the War on Drugs became the new justification for U.S. interference. Consequently, in 1962, the Colombian and American governments initiated Plan *Lazo* which included tactical support, counterinsurgency training to the Colombian military forces and a new policy. Operation *Marquetalia* was launched in May 1964 as a part of this plan. The Colombian army attacked this large, resistant communist settlement and levelled it to the ground.²⁵⁴ As a result, escapees reformed and a new actor entered the scene: the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). This guerrilla group is inspired by the Marxist ideology and is nowadays one of the richest guerrilla armies in the world. They still have control over numerous rural areas, which provide the perfect circumstances to produce drugs and to make considerable profits out of the illegal drug trade²⁵⁵.²⁵⁶ In 1965, another guerrilla group, the National Liberation army (also known by its Spanish acronym ELN) was formed by intellectuals. They were motivated by the revolution in Cuba and are also supporters of the Marxist ideology. Although they were seen as more ideological, political and with more urban influence than the FARC, they also turned to drug trafficking and kidnapping for ransom. After their peak in the nineties, the group is today only a small fraction of what they used to be.²⁵⁷ The two guerrilla groups are similar, both in their programmes and aims. Similarly, they claim to represent the rural poor class and their aspirations and they fight against the U.S. interference in

²⁵³ Henderson, 2015, pp. 93 – 94.

²⁵⁴ Henderson, 2015, pp. 94 – 96.

²⁵⁵ The profits of this illegal drug trade vary from an estimated 500 to 600 million dollars per year, experts say. The US justice department stated in 2006 that the FARC is the supplier of more than 50% of the world's cocaine.

²⁵⁶ Shingleton , 2001, p. 256; The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 13; UNRIC, n.d., para. 1 – 3; Vulliamy, 2015, para. 18.

²⁵⁷ Shingleton , 2001, p. 256; The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 13; UNRIC, n.d., para. 9 – 11.

the country, privatisation and multinationals. Both are also on the terrorist list of the U.S. and the European Union. Despite these similarities, cooperation between the FARC and ELN is definitely not an obvious practice. There are still many areas in which they fight each other.²⁵⁸ However, they are definitely not the only guerrilla groups in Colombia. There are the Popular Liberation Army (known by its Spanish acronym EPL) and the 19th of April Movement (known as M-19), but both have largely been demobilised. Their members have joined political parties or have resumed their violent activities.²⁵⁹

The government encounters a lot of difficulties in combatting these guerrillas, demobilising them and taking back control over the rural areas that are under the rule of these groups. As a result of these failed attempts, landowners and other frustrated Colombians took matters and weapons into their own hands and united in paramilitary groups against the guerrillas. In 1997, various paramilitaries merged into an umbrella organisation, called the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). Also this group turned to drug trafficking in order to finance their activities. The government decided in 2003 to demobilise the AUC. Even though this process partially failed because some paramilitaries were never targeted or had the chance to re-group, the government denies the presence of paramilitaries in the country. They are now classified as “criminal gangs”, but are in fact made up of former AUC members and leaders.²⁶⁰

A last factor that has a considerable impact on the conflict is narcotics. As already mentioned, both the guerrilla groups, as the successor paramilitary groups, are involved in and make money out of the illegal drug trade. Furthermore, drug cartels also had a destabilising effect on the country and the conflict, with the Medellin Cartel of Pablo Escobar as the most famous case. Sometimes, the cartels work

²⁵⁸ Vulliamy, 2015, para. 18, 39 – 41; UNRIC, n.d., para. 13.

²⁵⁹ Henderson, 2015, p. 97; Stanford University, 2012, para. 1 – 2; United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2003, para. 1 – 14.

²⁶⁰ Salamanca, 2008, pp. 22 – 23; Shingleton, 2001, p. 256; The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, pp. 11 – 13; UNRIC, n.d., para. 14 – 17.

closely together with paramilitary or guerrilla groups for drug trafficking, but differ noticeably as they are not ideologically or politically inspired.²⁶¹

In conclusion, the Colombian civil war counts three sides, with civilians as its main victims: the government, the guerrilla movements, such as the FARC and ELN, and the successor paramilitary groups or criminal gangs. The drug cartels can be considered as a fourth party to this conflict due to their violent nature, connections with the other parties and their destabilising role in the country. The complexity and the long history of the conflict make a successful transition to peace a long and delicate undertaking. The stakes are high during the current peace talks. However, a successful outcome will not lead to immediate peace, the process to peace will take a long time and will require a lot of patience.²⁶²

²⁶¹ Gillin, 2015, para. 3 – 4, 11 – 19; Shingleton, 2001, pp. 257 – 258; Vulliamy, 2015, para. 12.

²⁶² Salamanca, 2008, p. 24; The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 13; Vulliamy, 2015, para. 3.

5.2. Colombian conflict and its effect on children

Conflict affects the lives of many people, not in the least of children.²⁶³ Especially in Colombia, children are overly subjected to the negative impacts of the internal war. In this subchapter, I decided to highlight three of them: displaced children, child soldiers and children that were maimed or killed by landmines. I will shortly elaborate on these aspects and provide some statistics, in order to emphasise the importance of qualitative, inclusive reintegration programmes and further justify my choice of Colombia as a case study for this thesis. Furthermore, I will briefly discuss some legislative initiatives that Colombia has taken to address these issues. The limited space of this thesis, however, does not allow to discuss all the consequences or relevant laws in detail.

5.2.1. *General safeguards for Colombian children*

In general, Colombia has sufficient safeguards in place to protect the rights of children. Aside from the ratification of the CRC and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, there are national laws and policies that address the different issues children have to face during the conflict.²⁶⁴ First of all, article 44 of the Colombian Constitution protects the fundamental rights of children. Furthermore, there is the Code of Childhood and Adolescents of 2006 that contains some provisions on children affected by conflict. In 2005, the government passed the Justice and Peace Law²⁶⁵ which not only deals with the demobilisation of armed groups, but also the rights of victims and reparations of crimes, such as child recruitment or sexual violence against children.²⁶⁶ The human rights situation in Colombia is also regularly scrutinised by international mechanisms. The Task Force of the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, for example, is present in Colombia since the end of 2008. Established through UN Security Council Resolution 1612 in 2005, it is mandated to collect

²⁶³ Holland & Rahim, 2006, p. ii.

²⁶⁴ The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 34.

²⁶⁵ I refer the reader to the work of Felipe Gómez: “Colombia en su Laberinto: Una Mirada al Conflicto” for a more detailed analysis of this Law.

²⁶⁶ Ibidem, pp. 34 – 35.

information on six severe violations²⁶⁷ against children in conflict, among them the recruitment and use of child soldiers. These reports are reviewed by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and its Secretary-General in order to make recommendations. Colombia, the FARC and ELN have been frequently mentioned in their annual report for the use of child soldiers.²⁶⁸ Furthermore, the Protection Cluster initiated their activities in Colombia in 2006. This is an initiative of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, a forum of UN and non-UN humanitarian partners, and aims at coordinating and making humanitarian assistance more effective. In Colombia, there is a separate cluster on the protection of civilians and children. Of course, UNICEF Colombia also has an important role to play in these matters.²⁶⁹ Finally, on national level the Victims and Land Restitution Bill (further: Victims' Law) was passed in 2011, but this will be discussed in the next paragraph.²⁷⁰

5.2.2. *Displaced children in Colombia*

In the first semester of 2014, over 64 000 people were officially regarded as internally displaced. Even though the government and the FARC have gathered to negotiate about peace, the impact of the ongoing confrontations and the terror still cause civilians to flee the rural areas or between big cities.²⁷¹ Since the beginning of the internal conflict, more than 5,7 million Colombians have been internally displaced, which makes Colombia the country with the highest number of IDPs after Syria.²⁷² It is estimated that fifty per cent of these IDPs are children under the age of eighteen.²⁷³ As already mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, internally displaced children are particularly vulnerable to a variety of issues, such as health issues, exploitation, violence, recruitment,

²⁶⁷ The other violations are: killing and maiming of children, sexual violence against children, attack against schools or hospitals, denial of humanitarian access for children and abduction of children.

²⁶⁸ The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, pp. 40 – 42.

²⁶⁹ Ibidem, pp. 45 – 46.

²⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 34.

²⁷¹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2014, pp. 39 – 42; UNHCR, 2014, p. 2..

²⁷² Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2014, p. 11; UNHCR, 2014, p. 2.

²⁷³ The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 13.

stigmatisation and discrimination.²⁷⁴ The Colombian government and especially the Constitutional Court have put considerable efforts into developing a comprehensive and progressive legal framework for addressing these internal displacement issues.²⁷⁵ As a result of protests by civil society organisations and the displaced community, a first significant step was taken in 1997 with the adoption of Law 387.²⁷⁶ It clarifies the responsibilities of the government with regards to prevention, the rights of the IDPs, their protection and assistance, as well as also created various assisting agencies.²⁷⁷ However, the government did not put enough efforts into implementing this legislation. The Constitutional Court therefore condemned the Colombian state for non-compliance and violation of the rights of IDPs in 2004. This well-known judgment T-025/04 announced an “unconstitutional state of affairs”, which obliged the state to take several measures to provide better assistance and protection.²⁷⁸ Moreover, Writ 251 of 2008 advocated for a different approach of internally displaced children and their specific vulnerabilities.²⁷⁹ Although the government made some improvements, a limited number of IDPs can benefit from the existing support. The Constitutional Court played a significant role in pushing the state for more substantial advancements by issuing more rulings and decisions on this matter.²⁸⁰ This led to the adoption of the Victims’ Law in June 2011 which aims to compensate the millions of victims and, where possible, give back the land to the displaced people. To fulfil these important responsibilities, the government has established a Victims’ Unit, a Centre for Historical Memory and a Land Restitution Unit and has assigned the Department for Social Prosperity with the coordination of reparation and assistance programmes.²⁸¹ A separate chapter, *Título VII*, deals specifically with the “protection of boys, girls and adolescents that are victims” and includes provisions about justice, reparations, abuse and

²⁷⁴ Mooney, 2005, pp. 15 – 17.

²⁷⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2014, pp. 40 – 42; Stirk, 2013, p. 1.

²⁷⁶ Celis, 2009, pp. 90 – 91.

²⁷⁷ Arango, 2009, pp. 118 – 119; Stirk, 2013, pp. 7 – 11.

²⁷⁸ Celis, 2009, p. 98; Stirk, 2013, p. 7; The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 34.

²⁷⁹ The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 34.

²⁸⁰ Celis, 2009, p. 98; Stirk, 2013, p. 8.

²⁸¹ Stirk, 2013, pp. 8 – 9; The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 34.

exploitation, recruitment, landmines, etc. with regards to children.²⁸² Even though more than 150 000 victims have received reparation or psychosocial care in 2012, it is too early to discuss whether or not the law is a success story.²⁸³

5.2.3. *Child soldiers in Colombia*

Despite a lack of exact statistics, a recent report of the *Centro de Memoria Histórica* estimates that between 8 000 and 14 000 children and adolescents were recruited by the illegal armed groups and many more were forced to flee their homes out of fear for recruitment. The average age of recruitment in 2009 was 11,8 years old.²⁸⁴ The Colombian state has put some policies and laws in place in order to tackle this very pressing issue. The national law sets the minimum age of voluntary or compulsory recruitment into state and non-state armed forces at 18.²⁸⁵ Furthermore, as mentioned before, the Justice and Peace Law plays an important role in the demobilisation and punishment of child soldiers recruitment²⁸⁶. It goes without saying that prevention should be the core objective. Decree 4690 therefore established the Intersectorial Commission for the Prevention of Recruitment and Use of Children and Adolescents by Illegal Armed Groups in 2007 in order to assist with and strengthen prevention policies. This Commission provided prevention and protection guidelines for the governments on various levels.²⁸⁷ Also article 181 of the 2011 Victims' Law talks about the necessity of taking measures to protect children against illegal recruitment and it, moreover, offers reparation to these victims. Despite these safeguards children are still used by armed groups as child soldiers.²⁸⁸ It is therefore very important to demobilise them and to offer a qualitative, inclusive reintegration process. The social welfare agency of the Colombian government is in charge of the reintegration programmes for former child soldiers. However,

²⁸² The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 34.

²⁸³ Stirk, 2013, p. 8.

²⁸⁴ Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013, p. 85; The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 16.

²⁸⁵ The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 16.

²⁸⁶ The first conviction was passed in 2010 for the crime of child recruitment by former paramilitaries.

²⁸⁷ Ibidem, pp. 34 – 35.

²⁸⁸ Ibidem.

a systematic process of demobilising and reintegrating these children is lacking and the victims are mostly put in institutional care instead of family-based care. Although the latter is more effective than institution-based programmes, the funding is insufficient to cover the costs of family-based care. There are not enough resources to offer qualitative skills trainings and other economic activities in order to keep them away from criminal groups. So, a lot remains to be done in this area.²⁸⁹ Lastly, the Victims' Law discharge child soldiers from their criminal responsibility for the acts they have committed while they were serving the non-state armed groups. However, this is only the case for children that have left the group before they have turned eighteen and for former child soldiers that are not related to the new paramilitary successor groups. Many organisations have criticised this aspect of the law and urge the government to change it.²⁹⁰

5.2.4. Colombian children maimed or killed by landmines

According to the Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor 2013, Colombia had the second highest number of child casualties (57) from mines and/or explosive remnants of war after Afghanistan.²⁹¹ Since 1990 until May 2015, the *Programa Presidencial para la Acción Integral contra Minas Antipersonal* have registered 11 122 victims, of which 40% are civilians and 20% with a fatal outcome. In total, children make up for around 30% of the civilian casualties in Colombia.²⁹² Some of these youngsters even became victims when walking to school, as armed groups plant landmines on the side of school paths to prevent the children from going to class.²⁹³ Even though the number of landmine victims have decreased, initiatives to protect the population and the children do not go far enough. Colombia ratified the Mine Ban Treaty in 2000, is party to the Convention on Conventional Weapons and its Protocol II on landmines and

²⁸⁹ Ibidem, pp. 16 – 20.

²⁹⁰ Ibidem, p. 21.

²⁹¹ Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, 2014(c), p. 2.

²⁹² Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, 2014(a), p. 4; Sistema de Gestión de Información sobre Actividades relativas a Minas Antipersonal, 2015, p. 1.

²⁹³ The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 30.

started a Colombian Campaign against Landmines.²⁹⁴ Although the government adopted law 3750 in 2011 which regulates humanitarian demining by NGOs, only some areas can be targeted.²⁹⁵ Lastly, the Victims' Law also contains specific provisions on landmines. Article 189, for example, deals with reparation for children that have become a victim of landmines.²⁹⁶ Nevertheless, landmine education is restricted and does not offer enough information to protect the younger population.²⁹⁷

5.2.5. *Other effects of the Colombian conflict on children*

Landmines are not the only obstacles for children to attend school. Poverty is one of the main reasons why more than one million children in Colombia do not enjoy any education, especially in rural areas. The conflict can definitely have a deteriorating effect on this matter as well. Schools are being destroyed, occupied by armed groups or forced to close because of fighting around the building. Teachers are threatened, killed or obliged to flee, whereas recruitment of children even take place in the schoolyards. The government decided to establish protection and relocation programmes for teachers at risk. Nevertheless, more efforts are necessary to provide an effective protection of teachers and the right to education for children in general.²⁹⁸

During war time, especially girls are at risk of enduring SGBV. A recent survey in Colombia uncovered that 82% of female victims in conflict areas have never reported the sexual violence.²⁹⁹ Furthermore, there is evidence that the guerrilla and paramilitary groups use sexual violence as a war tactic and recruit boys and girls as sex slaves.³⁰⁰ Law 1257 of 2008 recognises the risks of the armed conflict for women and girls in relation to sexual violence and includes the

²⁹⁴ Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, 2014(b), para. 1 – 7.

²⁹⁵ Ibidem, para. 2; The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 30.

²⁹⁶ Ibidem, p. 34.

²⁹⁷ Ibidem, p. 30.

²⁹⁸ Ibidem, pp. 28 – 30.

²⁹⁹ Ibidem, p. 22; United Nations General Assembly, 2014, p. 36.

³⁰⁰ The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, p. 24.

duties of the state in the areas of protection, prevention and punishment. However, a lot of victims remain silent out of shame, fear of social rejection or due to the barriers. Even when they speak out, too often they are not heard or are being disappointed by the ignorant judicial system.³⁰¹

Colombia also has a high number of enforced disappearances. The *Centro de Memoria Histórica* registered a total of more than 19 000 cases, from 1970 until 2012.³⁰² Approximately 15% are children under the age of 18. However, this number is probably higher as the ages of numerous disappeared persons are unknown.³⁰³ Lastly, a recent report of this center shows that between 1958 and the end of 2012, 220 000 people died because of the conflict, of which more than 80% were civilians. This means that many children have lost one or both parents, siblings or other family members due to the armed conflict. This obviously has a considerable impact on their lives: they have to flee, have to raise their brothers and sisters alone or stop school in order to earn money.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ ABColombia, 2013, pp. 16 – 19; The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2012, pp. 22 – 23.

³⁰² Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2014, p. 274.

³⁰³ Ibidem, pp. 277 – 278.

³⁰⁴ Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013, pp. 31 – 32.

5.3. Results of the field trip to Colombia

In this subchapter, I will analyse the interviews that I have conducted during my field trip in Colombia and present the results. This should allow to know whether and how sport can contribute to the reintegration of conflict-affected children. The practicalities and methodology of this qualitative research can be found in the beginning of the thesis. In order to make the comparison between the literature and the findings in the field easier for the readers, I will use the same structure as the previous chapter which identified the ways in how sport can play a role in the reintegration process: sport as a safe space, sport as an inclusive space for dialogue and reconnecting, sport as a classroom for learning skills and finally, the limitations and challenges of sport. Each of these subdivisions will have quotes of children, coaches, coordinators, psychologists and government officials and will include observations I have made during the trip. Except for Juan Carlos Reyes Cañón, María Paula Mejía and “A.R.”, all interviews were conducted in Spanish. The used quotes were translated by interpreters at the time of the interview.

5.3.1. *Sport as a safe space*

The interviews with sport projects for the reintegration of conflict-affected children led me to underprivileged and impoverished suburbs of big Colombian cities, where many displaced and dysfunctional families live. Without a local, it is unsafe to walk there and even they cannot cross some invisible boundaries out of fear to get attacked or killed by gangs. However, there is one place that seems to be a constant bundle of joy: the sports field, where children are playing football, karate or ultimate. It appears to be unaffected by the grey, menacing atmosphere that can be felt all around. This impression of safety was shared by many children. They agree that playing sports puts them in a safer environment and offers them protection.

I feel more safe here, nobody bothers me, kills or bullies me. It gives me a safe environment, away from the people that may harm me, drugs and bad friends. It is a much better place here, I can feel safe.

- Diego, 11 years

I grew up in a drugs environment, my family, my parents. Since I was very young, I saw football as a tool to get away from that environment. I have always seen football as a tool, not only for me but also for other children to change their environment.

- Jarbi, Coach

During the practice, all children looked very happy and relaxed. They were laughing all the time and were having a lot of fun. The interviewed children also told that sport brings them joy and is a way to escape their problems. In general, children, coaches and other interviewees agreed that it improves their mental and physical well-being and other areas of their lives in a fun way.

Karate helps me to have control and to relax. I also feel motivated when I do karate, it helps me to clear my mind from difficult things. Karate takes away my stress. And it is also very boring at home. Here I have fun with my friends.

- Camilo, 13 years

Sports is a healthy way to have fun and that improves the physical health and reduces the risk of diseases, such as obesity.

- Paula, Educational psychologist

Sport helps them to leave their everyday life, to escape their problems and to deal with new opportunities.

- Diana, Coach

Practices give these children new structure and goals in their life. Instead of being bored at home or wandering aimlessly on the streets, they look forward to the trainings, they do their homework and chores, so they can go to the sports field. A volunteer told me on the bus ride that these children finally have a

purpose, they have someone to look up to: not the guys in the motorcycle, doing drugs on the streets, but their coaches, teammates, the national heroes, like James Rodriguez. The children say that sport allows them to hope and dream to become that better person, to have a better life, as long as they work for what they want. The coaches convey that message through the trainings.

Now I think about the future. Sport helps me to be a better person and to dream about becoming a policeman, doctor or professional football player.

- Sergio Alejandro, 13 years

I maybe won't raise doctors, professors or engineers, but now these kids, they have at least dreams outside the society where they live in. They want to become the next James Rodriguez or the next famous football player now, but when they grow older, they will have all the tools to make a decision, to achieve whatever they want.

- Jarbi, Coach

The interviews also show that children gain more confidence in their own abilities through sport, their coaches and teammates. They say they have more self-esteem and trust in others.

I have been discriminated in society my entire life. Sport helps me not only physically, but also mentally. It also helps me to focus. Now I am happier, I have lost weight and I am not suffering from bullying anymore. My self-image changed completely, now my self-confidence is way higher.

- Maira, 14 years

As argued in the previous chapters, self-confidence is important for children to believe in the reintegration process and in being an active, valuable member of the society.

5.3.2. *Sport as an inclusive space for dialogue and reconnecting*

The organisations put a lot of efforts in stimulating the participation of family and the community into the projects. They organise regular meetings, sport activities and they invite them to watch the practice and games of their children. The government projects ensure the acceptance by the community by appointing a local leader who tells the other community members about the project and motivates them to accept and join the programme.

One of the things we do in this programme is that we involve their families and communities in the process. We bring all the community together and we make them rearrange the playground. So the families come together, we all paint, we all cook, we all talk about values, we talk things that are important in the community. We start building our connection of all community members around that space where sports activities will take place and then we start doing the activities with children.

- Maria, Coordinator Coldeportes' Programme
'Convivencia y Paz'

The community react positively, they are grateful. The project is supported through their participation in discussions and recreational activities, such as parent meetings and other recreational gatherings.

- Miguel, Coach

The objectives of the programme should be clear, because “*the most important thing is that the community understands the value of the programme and that they give their support.*”³⁰⁵ The organisations really feel the full support of the community. The fact that they provide a safe environment for the children, who are very precious to the entire community, and try to keep them on the right track is highly appreciated. This support is perceived by the adult interviewees as indispensable for the sustainability and success of the programme and the

³⁰⁵ Jimena, Educational psychologist.

reintegration. The efforts of the governments to include family and community are also recognised by the children. They sense that the community members encourage them and the project, although there are also people who do not understand the value of sport and do not really care about them.

I feel that the community respects us. Because sometimes the field is occupied by other people, but when we arrive they respect our programme and they leave.

- Juan Manuel, 13 years

Many community members understand the importance of this programme. There are also other people that don't like the programme, they say sport has no value.

- Sofia, 11 years

I was surprised to hear some children say that sport helped them having a better relationship with their parents, siblings and family. The values of respect, responsibility, abiding by the rules and coping with authority that were taught during practice were applied at home. The children mentioned that they had less discussions or fights with their mother and that they assisted more in chores at home.

Before I would always discuss and say bad things to my family, with my brother and mother. Because of the programme, I feel more trust in them. (...) Now, I remember what I have learned in this programme and stop fighting with her.

- Sergio Alejandro, 13 years

Sport and the programme helped me to appreciate my friends, my family. The relationship at home is better. I learned to respect my mother, my brothers and my friends, because before I was very rebellious.

- Daniela, 11 years

Families ties are also strengthened through their presence during meetings,

activities or practices. The interviewed children seemed eager to tell me that their mother or both their parents were actively participating in the programme's activities. The fact that their parents made efforts really seemed to please them. The coaches and other people from the organisation emphasised the importance of family's support for the reintegration of the child.

The community supports this sports programme, because it teaches us to be responsible. My farther and many parents comes to the activities, the games and meetings.

- Natalia, 10 years

The child has to accept that he is a victim and that he has to live with its new disability. The other thing is the rehabilitation with the family and that child that has to accept his prosthesis. Family support is here very important.

- Claudia, Coordinator reintegration programme
landmine victims

According to the interviewees, sport also enhances mutual respect among the children, but also between the children and their environment. A girl even told me that karate helped her in appreciating other people's opinion. Furthermore, the children were grateful for the sports programme, because it gave them more and good friends. After the training, there was no one going home alone, they were always in groups, laughing and having fun. Children really appreciate the programme for those good bonds with other children. It also stimulates them to choose good friends and to avoid bad influences. They often referred to their teammates as their second family. The individual differences in the team were bridged through forming a common identity. Being a team player and helpful towards others are, therefore, perceived as very important values by the children. Also the bond with the coach was very good: they see him as a good friend, an example, a brother and even a father.

I am very shy and lonely, but this programme gave me friends.

- Natalia, 10 years

When we get out of school, we come here to play. In that way, we can avoid schoolmates that do drugs and all those things, because we are focusing on sports. Football changed my life, it gave me a lot of good friends, that are like a second family, a second home to me. (...) It teaches me to be respectful, to be respectful with others and to share with my team and to be a team player.

- Marlon, 14 years

The coaches are very important for me, because they are like a father to us. The coaches take care of us and teach us many valuable things for your entire life. A real coach is like a parent, like a father.

- Michael, 13 years

Also the adults recognised the valuable role of sport in making friends, creating a social network, establishing social integration and in changing the way they interact with others or relate to them.

When the kids playing alone with their own prosthesis, they feel really insecure. The acceptance of their prosthesis is not the same as when they are playing with other children, it will make the acceptance easier. (...) The objective of the programme is to improve the life of children, we want to impact social aspects of the child's life.

- Claudia, Coordinator reintegration programme
landmine victims

It is a place of friendship and respectful manners which reflects the values and life skills that have been taught. Sport makes the interaction with their teachers or peers easier. It is a space of opinion and helps to cope in different situations

than their homes.

- Julian, Coach

Coaches and other interviewed stakeholders say that sport is a way to rebuild social and cultural structures and to unite people that are different. The strength of sport, they say, is its inclusiveness and its ability to reconstruct and reconnect.

I think sport, the smallest thing, can unite people. We need to work harder in this country to find those common things that bring us together instead of the differences that separate us.

- Juan Carlos Reyes Cañón,

Director of the Dirección del Sistema Nacional de Juventud

We try to rebuild the family and social connections and the social and cultural structures. Sports permit these reconstructions One of the other advantages is the inclusive character of sports.

- Gerson, Coach

5.3.3. Sport as a classroom for learning skills

In most organisations, I saw that the coach began and ended the practice with talking about values, what they had learned, how they could use it in their daily lives, etc. It is hardly surprising that, according to the interviewed children, sport mainly taught them new values, principles and attitudes. There is an entire variety of skills that were mentioned: from football skills, open-mindedness, team play, patience, self-control to responsibility, being integral, abiding by rules and communication and leadership skills. A boy even mentioned that he learned to respect girls, because they are equal to him. Respect and discipline were probably the values that were mentioned the most.

Sports opens a lot of doors and I also have more life skills by now. If you say somewhere that you are a football player, they immediately now that you are a

responsible, disciplined person and that you take care of yourself.

- Christian David, 17 years

Sport teaches me to be respectful towards my teammates and in the classroom, to treat everyone with respect, but also to be responsible and show discipline, also in school.

- Diego, 11 years

I want to be an integral football player with values and a team player.

- Sergio Alejandro, 13 years

The children acknowledge in the interviews the importance of these values for the rest of their life and in various other areas than just sport. They said that they try to apply the values that the coach teaches them in everyday life. Furthermore, children often replied that the sports programme helps them to become a better person, to make healthy life choices and that it gives them new opportunities to grow and to achieve their goals.

Before the programme, I was a child from the streets, I had no plans and nothing to do in my life. I just hit the dogs on the streets and destroyed windows with rocks. The sports programme gave me a new opportunity to become a better person.

- Juan Manuel, 11 years

Karate teaches me a lot of things and it teaches me to become a better person in the future and allows me to choose a good career and study in a good university.

- Miguel, 12 years

Their mentors fully agree with the power of sport in teaching life skills and values and in changing bad attitudes into integral, respectful behaviour. They said to have seen many cases of children who were unmanageable, rude and

unable to cope with authority, but who eventually altered their manners completely through sports and the entire reintegration programme. Moreover, they recognise the role of sport in other areas of a child's life, such as school, friendships and jobs, *“if the methodology is applied correctly and if by the end of each session there is given feedback on how to apply the value and life skills in everyday life.”*³⁰⁶ The great advantage is that this all happens in a playful way.

We have a lot of dysfunctional families here unfortunately. We offer the children a space to give them values, a respectful environment where the children are taught the values that they weren't at home, where they can become responsible human beings. Responsible, not only in their duties, but also in their acts. We want to take them away from the dark corners.

- Delcy, Coordinator

It allows to train participants in a playful, recreational way while reinforcing social skills. Among the advantages are the formation, development of physical skills and communication skills, teamwork, decision making, leadership. I remember at the beginning of the programme that children often did not follow the rules, they were very undisciplined during activities. Now children have integrated more and more discipline, respect and rules in the activities.

- Carolina, Psychologist

Football is for us the means to an end. Through football, we teach values, we teach them to share and to be a team and all of this abilities you need to become an integral human being. We see sports as a tool, one of the strategies, because we see that sports become a discipline, a life goal, it lets them dream again.

- Cesar, Coach

As already mentioned in the literature study, coaches and successful national examples of sports people are very important for them. James Rodriguez, the

³⁰⁶ Julian, Coach.

most famous football player in Colombia, was the idol of almost every child I interviewed. They wanted to be like him and this stimulated them to work harder and to become better.

Daily they see successful examples of great athletes. This make them more directly involved, motivated and committed to their experiences and learning.

- Diana, Coach

5.3.4. Limitations and challenges

At the end of the interviews with the adults³⁰⁷, I asked them if working with sport has any limitations or challenges. Everyone is convinced of the role that sport can play in the reintegration process. However, there are some aspects that need to be taken into account. First of all, many interviewees emphasised that sport is just one of the tools to reach reintegration. They believe that the complexity of issues cannot be tackled by only one strategy. The full context needs to be addressed, so a comprehensive, holistic approach is necessary. Furthermore, they stressed the need to have the full support of the family, community and environment of the children. Also, there needs to be qualitative guidance by the coaches, they have to apply the methodology in a correct way in order to have long-term impact on the child's reintegration process. Finally, a reintegration programme using sport needs a qualitative follow-up in order to measure whether it has an impact and to determine if the progress can be really attributed to sport.

Addressing the problems cannot only happen through sports, it needs the participation and commitment from the entire multidisciplinary team. It is an issue that concerns everyone, from the family to the community.

- Andres, Social worker

³⁰⁷ I decided to ask this question only to the adult interviewees and not to the children. In interviews with the children, disadvantages or limitations were never mentioned.

Sports is just a tool, not the goal. It is the tool to reach that. It is not only sport and that is very important, because the range of issues, the reintegration that you want to address, it cannot be addressed by only one strategy.

- Maria, Coordinator Coldeportes' Programme
'Convivencia y Paz'

Another concern of many interviewees is the sustainability of the programmes, but also of the progress made during the reintegration projects. The community involvement, as well as continuous funding are essential for the continuation of the project. After all, the disruption of the sports programme can be dangerous for the children. They get demotivated, are angry and feel like their dreams have been taken away. This is linked with the efforts of many organisations to keep the children within the programme, because when they withdraw they might end up on the dangerous streets again.

But there are also kids that do not continue in the programme, they cannot handle the directions or the efforts that sports take. They go out of the programme and choose bad friendships. Three of the children were killed previous year and we see other children that dropped out doing drugs in dark corners. They don't continue with the process and then, they have no direction in their life.

- Delcy, Coordinator

If you don't provide continuity for the process, it will be impossible to have a real impact. (...) And what you want to do is when you want peace or social impact is that it becomes sustainable. If you won't make it sustainable, your efforts were useless.

- Maria, Coordinator Coldeportes' Programme
'Convivencia y Paz'

The insecurity of the neighbourhoods makes it challenging to work and may occasionally lead to the withdrawal of the project. Finally, a coach identified the competitive feelings that are usually linked to sport as a limitation.

The biggest disadvantage is competition, when the child loses the fun during practice, because the competition is very strong.

- Gerson, Coach

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the case study that I had chosen for the thesis: Colombia. First of all, in the introduction I gave a general background of the country and the reasons for choosing it as a case study. Although the conflict is still going on, statistics showed that Colombia is economically on the rise. Its population is quite young and is increasingly moving to big cities. In the next subchapter, I attempted to untangle the complexity of the Colombian conflict by discussing the motivations and the actors involved. The following four parties can be identified as involved in the conflict: the government, the guerrilla groups, with FARC as the largest one, the paramilitary AUC, now categorised as “criminal gangs”, and lastly, the drug cartels. In November 2012, the peace talks between the FARC and the government started, but for two of the five agenda items no full agreement has been reached yet. The second subchapter elaborated on the horrendous impact that the Colombian conflict has on its children and discussed relevant legislation and statistics. Colombia is still one of the worst ranked countries with regards to child displacement, child recruitment and child casualties of mines and/or explosive remnants of war. Furthermore, I briefly discussed the impact of the conflict on education, the prevalence of SGBV, the high amount of enforced disappearances and deaths. The final subchapter presented the results of my field trip to Colombia. The objective of the interviews was to know how sport helps the reintegration of conflict-affected children, but also what its limitations and challenges are. The research showed that sport can definitely be an interesting tool. It was clear from the answers that sport provides a happy and safe space, where life skills and values are taught, people are reunited, good friendships are formed and family and community ties are rebuild and strengthened. Sport gives them more opportunities to become a better person and to reach their goals. These are elements that were also identified in the literature study as important for a successful reintegration. However, the interviewees also identified limitations and conditions in order to use sport successfully as a tool for reintegration. The most important remark is that sport is just one of the many tools. In order to address the complexity of issues that children deal with, a holistic approach and more strategies are needed.

CONCLUSION

Over the last decades, the changing nature of armed conflict has increasingly affected innocent civilians and children. There is a growing need of qualitative reintegration programmes for these young victims in order for them to re-establish social structures and relations, to take up their role again as valuable members in the community and to get familiar with a new space where people need to learn how to peacefully co-exist. This thesis has the objective to contribute to this reintegration process of conflict-affected children by proposing and examining an alternative way, namely through sport. Many international organisations have already recognised the power of sport in social change. However, there is a lack of literature on sport as a tool for reintegration and especially of practical studies that monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of sport. Therefore, in order to answer the main research question on how sport can be used as a tool for the reintegration process of conflict-affected children, a literature study was conducted, as well as a field study to Colombia, where children are overly affected by the long and complex internal war.

In general, children suffer disproportionately from the consequences of conflict. Many children are still recruited in the armed forces, as soldiers, messengers, but also as sex slaves. Sexual and gender-based violence is highly prevalent in times of war. It can even be a reason for families to flee their hometowns. However, displaced children often do not arrive in safe environments where they are free from violence. On the contrary, they might be exposed to various forms of exploitation, abductions, discrimination, exclusion and poor health conditions. Due to the conflict, children regularly cannot access food, health services or they live in unhygienic circumstances, which make them more prone to diseases. Moreover, landmines and bullets still kill or maim children, whereas the horrendous circumstances leave them traumatised. Additionally, in many conflict areas, children are deprived from their right to education, because of the fighting in the direct environment, risk of recruitment, killings and disappearances of teachers and even the military use or complete destruction of educational facilities. The result is that many children get alienated from their families, communities and cultures.

The drafters of the CRC recognised the devastating impact that an armed conflict can have on children. Article 39 CRC stimulates State Parties to take measures for the social reintegration of these affected children. A study of the literature on this topic allowed me to identify some key elements for a successful reintegration programme. Foremost, it should provide a comprehensive answer to the complexity of issues that conflict-affected children deal with. With the help of various actors and especially community-based initiatives, a more sustainable process can be offered. Furthermore, the concerns and wishes of the children regarding their reintegration should be taken into account. The participation in any kind of decision-making is the first step to inclusion in the society and in stimulating dialogue between all community members. The acceptance by the community, but, more importantly, by the family is essential for the reintegration process of the child. It is beneficial in the sense that it creates mutual understanding, respect and a more positive surrounding, which can help to recover from traumas and to prevent bad influences. Education, vocational and other skills training, often interrupted during conflict, also play a considerable role in this regard, as they will give children the necessary tools and knowledge to make appropriate life decisions. Moreover, these skills trainings enhances their prospects to a good job and to become a valuable member of the society. It offers safeguards against engaging in illegal activities or recruitment. Safety was also identified as one of the key conditions for a successful reintegration, because it makes it easier to recover, to have trust in others and themselves and to empower the child to rebuild positive, non-violent and responsible identity. Security does not only entail protection from violence, landmines, exploiters, but also access to justice, community and health services. Lastly, a good physical and mental well-being forms the basis of the reintegration process. The scars of the conflict need healing, through counselling, therapy, physical rehabilitation and even collective, community-based ceremonies, which enhances forgiveness and mutual understanding. The healing process can, furthermore, have a positive impact on the child's motivation and confidence in their own abilities.

Ideally, sport as a tool has an impact in all of these areas. The literature study and the field trip distinguished three main areas in which sport contributes to the reintegration

process. It offers a safe space, where children and community members can gather for dialogue and reconnecting and where they can learn valuable skills. The results of the literature and the interviews with Colombian children, coaches, mentors and government officials coincided with each other. First of all, both largely agreed that sport can be an interesting tool for the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict, such as child soldiers, displaced children, youngsters with conflict-related disabilities or that have witnessed violence. It was clear from the interviews that sport makes the children happy, more confident, relaxed and that it protects them from the violent life on the streets and negative influences. Sport makes them feel empowered, motivated to make the right decisions, to chase their dreams and reach their goals. It can also be a valuable tool to unite people and to rebuild and strengthen family and community ties, especially in those programmes that actively involved the environment of the children and stimulated values like respect for others. Children were especially grateful, because sport gave them good friends and a second family. Lastly, the practices taught them many life skills and values, such as discipline, team play, responsibility and communication skills, which they try to apply in their daily life. The coach and sportive national heroes play an important exemplary role. Nevertheless, the literature and the interviews also identified limitations, as well as requirements for sport to be a successful reintegration tool. First of all the full support of family and community is regarded indispensable for a sustainable reintegration. Furthermore, the withdrawal out of the programme or its termination can be counterproductive, as children can be tempted to go back onto the streets and take negative decisions. The coaches have to offer qualitative guidance, discourage antisocial behaviour and prevent competitive feeling. The use of an effective methodology and a follow-up need to be guaranteed. Finally, I agree with the literature and the interviewees who state that, despite the considerable impact of sport, it cannot be overestimated. Sport is just a tool and only one of the ways to provide a comprehensive answer to the complexity of issues that armed conflict causes. These matters cannot be addressed by one strategy, it has to be complemented with other reintegration tools.

Practitioners and policy-makers are keen on looking for ways to improve the

reintegration of war victims, because its outcome reaches beyond the individual and community level. Its success stimulates peaceful coexistence and can prevent new tensions and a violent relapse. This study aimed at delivering a modest contribution to the reintegration process by examining sport as an alternative strategy and by identifying its advantages and limitations. Nevertheless, future research on this topic is definitely necessary. Studies that monitor the effectiveness of sport, that evaluate which methodologies work and do not work and that examine which improvements can be dedicated specifically to sport will advance the entire reintegration process. When implemented by a qualified team of professionals and through a proven effective methodology, sport should be considered as a strategy in programmes aiming at reintegrating conflict-affected children. After all, sport makes them happy, empowers them to become the best version of themselves and builds bridges in conflict-torn societies.

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