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Community-Based Reintegration of War-Affected Young Mothers: Participatory Action Research (PAR) in Liberia, Sierra Leone & Northern Uganda

Susan McKay, Angela Veale, Miranda Worthen, and Mike Wessells
with
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Victor Gbegba, Doris Geedah, Ebun James,
Anthony Kerwegie, Evelyn Laruni, Agnes Marah, Stella Neema,
Francis Okema, Grace Onyango, Patrick Onyango,
Debey Sayndee, Dora Single, and Samuel Beresford Weekes

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This report can be found at www.pargirlmothers.com.
Please visit this website for additional material about the PAR Project.

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Description of PAR team

Academic Organizers

Susan McKay, *University of Wyoming, USA*

Angela Veale, *University College Cork, Ireland*

Mike Wessells, *Columbia University, USA*

Miranda Worthen, *University of California, Berkeley, USA*

Team Members

Liberia

Debey Sayndee, *University of Liberia*

Celestine Wawa-Brown, *Save the Children UK (Liberia)*

Save the Children works in the areas of healthcare, food, education and protection. The organization has been in Liberia since 1991, at first concentrating on meeting the urgent needs of children caught up in the conflict and now safeguarding children's rights through building safer organizations and enhancing children's participation at all levels of our work.

Doris Geedah, *Touching Humanity In Need of Kindness (THINK)*

Touching Humanity In Need of Kindness (THINK), a national humanitarian development non-governmental organization, was established April 4, 2003 by three Liberian women who are committed to championing the rights and welfare of women and children in Liberia. THINK's mission is to demonstrate love to the poor, especially women and children.

Sierra Leone

Samuel Beresford Weekes, *Fourah Bay College*

Stephen Borbo, *Christian Brothers*

Christian Brothers has more than two hundred years of experience working with marginalized children and youth in many parts of the world. The organization has worked in Sierra Leone for over ten years running projects for the social and economic rehabilitation and reintegration of several categories of marginalized children and youth.

Agnes Marah, *ChildFund Sierra Leone (CCF)*

ChildFund (formerly Christian Children's Fund) works in 33 countries, assisting more than 10.5 million children and families. CCF started operations in Sierra Leone 1985 and seeks to empower communities to break the vicious cycle of poverty, give children voice in the realization of their potential, and improve the standard of living in a safe and conducive environment.

Ebun James, *Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL)*

The Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) began in Sierra Leone as the United Christian Council with an original membership of seven churches. The Mission of CCSL is to foster ecumenical actions in promoting holistic (spiritual and social) development among the poor and vulnerable communities. http://www.ccslweb.org/

Victor Gbegba, *National Network for Psychosocial Care (NNEPCA)*

National Network for Psychosocial Care (NNEPCA) is a local humanitarian organization founded in 2002. NNEPCA's aim is to create a supportive network of psychosocial professionals to enhance capacity building and train on psychosocial issues and research. The goal is to ensure quality service delivery for communities affected by the civil conflict in Sierra Leone.

Uganda

Evelyn Laruni, *Research Coordinator for Uganda*

Stella Neema, *Makerere University*

Gabriel Banya and Francis Okema, *Caritas, Gulu Archdiocese*

Caritas seeks to create a peaceful and caring community where sustainable support for the vulnerable prevails through love and reconciliation. Its mission is to empower the vulnerable and people affected by conflict and displacement to cope positively.

Anthony Kerwegie, *Concerned Parents Association (CPA)*

Concerned Parents Association (CPA) is a child-focused nongovernmental organization started in 1996 by a group of parents with a concern for the return of their children abducted by the LRA. The agency provides relief and development programs through its grassroots structure called the Parents' Support Group and Children/Youth Groups.

Patrick Onyango, *Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO)*

TPO commenced operations in Uganda in 1994 with the aim of providing psychosocial support and mental health care to communities, families and individuals in conflict and post conflict settings. TPO is working to empower local communities, civil society organizations and the government to help meet the needs of the citizens in Uganda.

Grace Onyango and Dora Single, *World Vision (WV)*

World Vision, a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization, is dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice and promote human transformation of all people. WV is committed to ensuring that hope is restored to vulnerable girls and has worked with young mothers since 1995.

Acknowledgements

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We dedicate this report to the young mothers who participated in this study and who inspired us with their determination and effort to improve their lives despite the adversity they have experienced.

We are deeply appreciative of the primary funding for this study that was provided by Oak Foundation and Pro Victimis Foundation and for their ongoing interest and support of this study. The Rockefeller and Compton Foundations and UNICEF West Africa provided additional financial assistance for conferences of the study team. We thank all of our donors for making it possible for our team to meet and engage in critical dialogues that contributed greatly to this study.

Definitions

Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups (CAAFAG):

The definition commonly applied to children associated with armed forces and groups in prevention, demobilization and reintegration programs derives from the *Cape Town Principles and Best Practices* (1997), in which the term "child soldier" refers to: "Any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including, but not limited to: cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and for forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms."

In his February 2000 report to the UN Security Council, the Secretary-General defined a child soldier "as any person under the age 18 years of age who forms part of an armed force in any capacity and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members, as well as girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage." The CRC specifies that a child is every human below the age of 18.

The term "children associated with armed forces and groups," although more cumbersome, is now used to avoid the perception that the only children of concern are combatant boys. It points out that children eligible for release and reintegration programs are both those associated with armed forces and groups and those who fled armed forces and groups (often considered as deserters and therefore requiring support and protection), children who were abducted, those forcibly married and those in detention.

Access to demobilization does not depend on a child's level of involvement in armed forces and groups. No distinction is made between combatants and non-combatants for fear of unfair treatment, oversight or exclusion (mainly of girls). Nevertheless, the child's personal history and activities in the armed conflict can help decide on the kind of support he/she needs in the reintegration phase (www.unddr.org/iddrs/01/20.php).

Child Reintegration:

According to article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote … social reintegration of a child victim of … armed conflicts."

Reintegration includes family reunification, mobilizing and enabling the child's existing care system, medical screening and health care, schooling and/or vocational training, psychosocial support, and social and community-

based reintegration. Reintegration programs need to be sustainable and to take into account children's aspirations (www.unddr.org/iddrs/01/20.php).

Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR):

CBPAR seeks to generate knowledge and practice that is of genuine benefit to the community. It is highly-collaborative, bringing together cultural insiders with expert outsiders to develop all phases of the research. Common elements include jointly identifying research priorities within the community; promoting social change; guiding partnerships across sites; generating instrumental and practical knowledge; increasing focus on process rather than tangible outputs; and power sharing between researchers and communities.

Community-Based Reintegration:

Community-based reintegration is internally driven and is a reciprocal process wherein communities accept and support former CAAFAG and other vulnerable children to achieve a place and meaningful role within communities.

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR):

A process that contributes to security and stability in a post-conflict recovery context by removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate socially and economically into society by finding civilian livelihoods (www.unddr.org/iddrs/01/20.php).

Gender Relations:

The social relationships among men, women, girls and boys. Gender relations shape how power is distributed among women, men, girls and boys and how it is translated into different positions in society. Gender relations are generally fluid and vary depending on other social relations, such as class, race, ethnicity, etc. (www.unddr.org/iddrs/01/20.php).

Girl Mother:

For the original purpose of the study, a girl mother is defined as having been pregnant or given birth prior to the age of 18. (See definition of young mother below).

Psychosocial:

Refers to the close connection between psychological aspects of our experience (e.g., our thoughts, emotions, and behavior) and our wider social experience (e.g., our relationships, traditions and culture).

Violence Against Women / Gender-Based Violence:

Defined as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private. Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

"(a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;

"(b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

"(c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs" (UN General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 1993) (www.unddr.org/iddrs/01/20.php).

Young Mother:

For purposes of this report, young mother refers to youth between 15 and 30 years of age who are mothers, including former CAAFAG and other vulnerable young mothers in the community.

Executive Summary

Introduction

During the past decade, the international community has come to recognize that girls participate in armed groups and forces in substantial numbers. The majority of girls associated with armed forces or armed groups (CAAFAG) do not go through formal or informal disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR) processes. This is particularly the case for girls who became pregnant or had children during their time associated with armed forces or groups (i.e. young mothers). These pregnancies are often the result of rape or forced motherhood from "bush marriages" with male combatants. These young mothers[1] most often return to communities on their own, where they and their children frequently experience marginalization and stigmatization by their families and communities and are vulnerable to gender-specific discrimination and rights' violations.

In the ten-year interval (1997 to 2007) following the issuance of the Cape Town Principles, problems with formal DDR processes for children became more apparent and better practices in supporting children's reintegration were identified. While the Cape Town Principles only briefly mention problems facing women and girls formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, the Paris Principles specifically call for improved supports for girl CAAFAG. Indeed, the Paris Principles, the Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review and the IDDRS Standards all recognize girl mothers as a particularly vulnerable group, needing explicit attention within the context of their community. At the same time, the Paris Principles caution against excessively targeting specific groups for assistance and recommend instead providing community-based support *for all children* affected by armed conflict.

To date, good exemplars do not exist for how to meet both of these demands and create programming that addresses the specific concerns of young mothers and their children without excessively targeting this group. The project described in this report seeks to do just that by developing a reintegration project that includes young mothers formerly CAAFAG with other vulnerable young mothers in the community. Consistent with the Paris Principles' caution against excessive targeting, the project included approximately two-thirds young mothers who were former CAAFAG and one-third young mothers considered vulnerable but who were not CAAFAG.

[1] The study was designed to include girl mothers, both formerly associated with armed groups and other vulnerable young mothers who became pregnant or gave birth when they were under 18 years. Over a three-year period as the study progressed, females were enrolled who were older than our original criteria. Thus, in most of this report, we refer to young mothers instead of girl mothers. One exception is quotes from the young mothers who refer to themselves as "girl mothers."

The Participatory Action Research Project [2]

In this report, we describe a community-based participatory action research (PAR) project involving approximately 658 young mothers and over 1200 of their children living in the three war-torn countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Northern Uganda. Instead of using internationally-defined notions and adult-centric statements about what reintegration is, we sought to understand reintegration from the young mothers' perspectives, learning from them about what constitutes successful reintegration for themselves and their children. The project supported the young mothers in implementing actions that they thought would assist them in achieving their notion of successful reintegration. The project was implemented through an academic-NGO partnership that brought together a team from 10 non-governmental organizations, three African academics and four Western academics collaborating on the project over the course of nearly four years.

A central goal of the project was to support the implementation of the Paris Principles by providing inputs from the field about how to do reintegration with a strong emphasis on participation in different country contexts. The project centrally involves young mothers as highly-active participants who take leadership roles in program development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, working to reduce the powerful stigma they face through their garnering of local resources. The project works to develop organizational capacity to implement programs using highly participatory approaches. Underpinning all our work was the principle of "Do No Harm."

Operationally, the project took place in twenty field sites in the three countries. At each field site, agency partners established groups of approximately thirty young mothers who joined together to work collaboratively to identify the problems they and their children were facing and implement initiatives to try and mitigate those problems. Problems identified across the twenty sites were remarkably similar, reflecting difficulties with social stigma, access to education for the participants and their children, access to affordable medical care, and sustainable livelihoods. With local supports and social action funds, young mothers' groups prioritized their problems and came up with ways of addressing these challenges. Creative social action initiatives included hiring a nurse to teach about hygiene and sanitation, micro-credit to support individual petty trading, opening group businesses like a restaurant or a weaving cooperative, and building a collective groundnut farm on land donated by community members.

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[2] Community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) is described in Minkler, M. & Wallerstein, N. (2008) and Worthen, Veale, McKay, & Wessells (2010).

In addition to the support experienced through the group process, these actions worked to increase the well being of the young mothers and their children and to bring them into the fold of the community. The findings of this multi-year project are highlighted below, followed by recommendations to practitioners, donors, and policy makers operating in the field of reintegration and post-conflict child protection. Multi-media presentations are available on the project's website: www.pargirlmothers.com

Findings

- *The meaning of social (re)integration for young mothers is that they and their children are accepted, respected, and included as contributing family and community members.*

  Young mothers identified being responsible, respected, and taken seriously as key elements of social reintegration. They described the importance of participating in reciprocal support relationships within the community, including within their family. Being engaged in actively improving their lives, showing good mothering and self-care skills, and demonstrating behaviors consistent with community and gender norms were all critical to reintegration. These changes, in turn, led to greater community acceptance and decreased stigma and discrimination for them and their children.

- *To facilitate social reintegration that is community based and highly participatory, communities should be involved from the outset and should take ownership of the process.*

  Young mothers benefited from support of key community stakeholders because of the slow, deliberate engagement with community members initiated by all PAR team members from the beginning of the PAR. These supportive community members were critical in helping participants identify challenges in their communities, mobilizing resources to support their social actions, and motivating other community members to include the young mothers and their children within the life of the community.

- *Peer groups for young mothers are instrumental in providing psychosocial support for positive coping and social reintegration.*

  Group processes were the foundation of social reintegration as it was within the group that formerly associated young mothers and other vulnerable young mothers in the community learned to talk with and listen to each other in respectful ways, manage conflict, engage in collective problem solving, and give each other support. They were able to extend these behaviors, in turn, to their families

and communities as changes in one domain of young mothers' lives — such as building friendships — then stimulated changes in other areas.

- *Young mothers' peer groups are fostered by organizing, structuring, and expert facilitation by agency staff, whose ongoing aim is to shift decision making to the young mothers.*

  Highly-participatory reintegration is a long, decentralized process that requires substantial attention to its ongoing development in the field. Critical components include close mentoring by a caring facilitator, cultivation of young mothers' agency through the development of their decision-making power, and development of relationships between young mothers, community-members, and agency focal people. The facilitation skills required to support young mothers through this process are different, but complementary to, traditional child protection programming skills.

- *Young mothers' group work facilitates their reintegration through increasing their strength and improving their capacity to be seen and heard in communities.*

  When organized in groups, young mothers were more visible, had a stronger voice, and were better able to access community resources and withstand external threats. Groups were better positioned than loosely-associated individuals to request support from community members, such as access to land for farming or support with childcare or scholarships for their children. As groups, young mothers were also more comfortable seeking aid for individual group members from district leaders in cases of abandonment or abuse.

- *Economic livelihood supports are instrumental in improving young mothers' family and community status and relationships. Sustainability is strongly related to flexibility and diversification in income generating activities.*

  Young mothers identified locally feasible livelihood opportunities that required few external inputs. Individual and group small businesses that were flexible and suited to the needs of the community thrived best, often providing ample funds to pay for school fees for the participant and her children and allowing the young mother to contribute financially to her family. When businesses failed, group savings helped give young mothers the opportunity to start again. In urban areas in particular, the global

economic downturn proved particularly harmful to young mothers' businesses.

- *Family relationships are significantly improved through young mothers' participation in the PAR project.*

  Young mothers' relationships with their families improved as they became able to provide support, not just receive support. As young mothers increasingly fulfilled role expectations of a good mother, daughter, and girlfriend or wife, they experienced enhanced status, acceptance, love, belonging, and respect within their families.

- *Young mothers show improved physical & psychological well being.*

  Young mothers' emotional and behavioral problems were reduced over the course of the project. Participants exhibited better self-care and psychological well being and showed greater confidence and self-efficacy. However, medical crises for young mothers or their children often provoked financial hardship, and some young mothers lost their businesses after using the capital to pay medical expenses.

- *Unwanted pregnancies remain a challenging issue for many young mothers.*

  Despite trainings that many groups received about pregnancy prevention, approximately a quarter of young mothers still encountered difficulty preventing unwanted pregnancies. This was especially problematic in Liberia, where almost two-thirds of young mothers continued to experience some difficulty preventing unwanted pregnancies. Across the three countries, the most common explanations for why they had difficulty preventing pregnancy were that they could not afford birth control, oral contraceptives failed, that their husbands did not support them using any form of birth control, or that they did not have knowledge about how to prevent pregnancy.

- *Children of young mothers show improved well being, which facilitates their social reintegration.*

  As young mothers' ability to provide food, clothing, and care for their children increased, the children became increasingly accepted by their families and communities. In many sites, the children were reportedly being treated no different from other children in the community.

- *Gender relations are complex. While some young mothers report supportive relationships, the majority say they do not experience their boyfriends/ husbands as supportive of them or their children.*

  Abuse by male partners was a problem in all three countries. Although in some cases, participants reported that their increased economic status enabled them to leave violent relationships or to get support from community members, in other instances economic independence seems to have exacerbated conflict with male partners. The majority of young mothers reported that their male partners were not supportive of their children. Participants found assistance in negotiating these complicated relationships from the group and community advocates.

- *Young mothers developed tools to address sexual exploitation and violence, often with the support of group members. However, shame is still a barrier to seeking help.*

  Although participants reported that shame might prevent them from seeking help in the case of sexual exploitation and violence, in several instances, young mothers mobilized as a group to support a young mother or her child who had been the victim of such crimes. Young mothers in Sierra Leone seemed to prefer using community-based resources such as chiefs or community elders, to handle such cases, while those in Liberia and Uganda favored reporting the cases to the police.

- *Participation in sex work decreases as young mothers gain confidence and self respect and develop alternative livelihood strategies.*

  Young mothers reported that they decreased or ended their reliance on transactional sex or relationships with boyfriends for economic security as they developed alternative livelihood strategies. Young mothers and community members viewed this movement out of sex work with pride. Community members in particular viewed this shift as a crucial step in reintegration, as girls transitioned into more socially desirable roles. However, there were still some communities where young mothers continued to engage in transactional sex as supplementary income support.

Recommendations for Practice & Policy

Recommendations for Practitioners

1. Enable meaningful participation, building reintegration supports around young mothers' own understandings and agency.
2. Facilitate group support among the girls.
3. Encourage effective mentoring and advocacy by respected community members.
4. Take a longer, slower approach to integration that builds a sense of ownership by the communities and the young mothers.
5. Build staff capacities for taking a more flexible, facilitative, young mother-centered approach.

Recommendations for Donors & Policy Makers

1. Programming for the integration of CAAFAG should include specific attention to young women and their children without targeting them excessively.
2. Economic reintegration is key for the successful integration of young mothers, including former CAAFAG.
3. Provide long-term, flexible, inclusive funding for the integration of formerly recruited young mothers.
4. Support young mothers' and women's rights as part of post-conflict transformation for development and peace.

Introduction

During the past decade, a remarkable shift has occurred as the international community has come to recognize that substantial numbers of girls participate in armed groups and forces.[3] Now, instead of conceptualizing children associated with armed forces or armed groups (CAAFAG) as being solely boys, the presence of girls is known to be a global phenomenon. A key learning that has emerged is that after being separated or having left armed forces and groups, most formerly associated girls do not receive dedicated assistance such as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR).[4, 5, 6] Figures estimated from national DDR programs show very low levels of participation of eligible girls that range between 8 and 15 percent.[7]

The majority of girls — and particularly young mothers — self-demobilize,[8] settling in communities where they are typically marginalized and stigmatized by their families and communities and experience gender-specific discrimination and rights' violations.[9] Isolated because of community rejection, lacking a livelihood, and finding survival difficult, many girls turn to sex work. Engaging in transactional sex or prostitution makes them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and recurring sexual violence in communities or internally displaced persons' (IDP) camps.[10] With children to care for and extremely limited resources, few social and economic opportunities are available to improve their desperate situations.[11] Support, if given, may not be appropriate for their ages, developmental, and gender-specific needs — for example, girls enroll in tailoring training courses when many people buy ready-made clothes and the training is too brief to gain sufficient expertise. As noted by Brett and Specht,[12] girls have more limited economic activities available and when they have children, they have added problems of access to work. In northern Uganda, the most common economic activity reported by women is alcohol brewing and distilling because it is relatively profitable and can be performed alongside

3 See for example, Veale, A. (2003); McKay, S. & Mazurana, D. (2004); Wessells, M. (2006, 2010); and Denov, M. (2010).

4 UN Integrated DDR Standards Sections 5.3. www.unddr.org/iddrs/05/30.php

5 The Paris Principles: Principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups. www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/parisprinciples/ParisPrinciples_EN.pdf

6 Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World.. www.unicef.org/publications/index_49985.html

7 Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (2008).

8 United Nations (2002); Farr, V. (2003).

9 McKay, S., Burman, M., Gonsalves, M., & Worthen, M. (2004); UNICEF (2007); UNICEF (2009); McKay, S. (2004).

10 McKay & Mazurana, (2004); Coulter, C. (2009).

11 Robinson, M., & McKay, S. (2005); UNICEF. (2007).

12 Brett, R., & Specht, I. (2004); Annan, J., Blattman, C., Carlson, K., Mazurana, D. (2008).

childcare and household responsibilities.[13] Further, their children are likely to face numerous child protection problems such as neglect, rejection, abuse, and high level of vulnerability.

The root cause of this inattention to young mothers' situations is gender discrimination in micro and macro societal structures, both traditional and contemporary, which privilege males over females and profoundly limits the attainment of the rights of girls and young women.[14] The international community also contributed to this discrimination by taking male-friendly, adult developed approaches to DDR rather than being sensitive to the presence of girls in armed forces and groups and identifying patterns of their participation and return. To be most effective, the reintegration of girls and young women should be developed within the context of the communities to which they and their children return — reintegration remaining a community-based process. In contrast, donor assistance has often excessively targeted formerly-recruited children, addressing them separate from their communities instead of looking more holistically at the community and attending to all vulnerable groups — a process which contributes to social divisions and fails to create sustainable change.[15]

In the ten years following the 1997 adoption of the Cape Town Principles, challenges with formal DDR processes for children became more apparent and better practices in supporting children's reintegration have been identified. This led to the development of the Paris Principles, which *inter alia* highlight the need for improved supports for girl CAAFAG. At the same time, they cautioned against excessive targeting of specific groups for assistance and recommended instead the provision of community-based support *for all children* affected by armed conflict. However, the Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review (hereafter called the Machel Review) observed that certain groups continue to require specific services and cited young mothers as an example. The Paris Principles similarly call for specific assistance within a supportive environment in negotiating emotional and practical challenges girl mothers face. Notably, in the Machel Review and other reports, girls returning from armed groups are recognized as resilient with the ability to recover when given proper help, support and encouragement at the community level.

The Machel Review advocated that broader and comprehensive reintegration programs that include girls should seek durable solutions using approaches that are inclusive, flexible, grounded in the community, based on child

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13 Blattman et al. (2008). McKay, S. (2006).

14 Worthen, M., Veale, A., McKay, S., & Wessells, M. (2010).

15 UNICEF (2007).

rights, and outside of or in addition to formal DDR processes.[16] An inclusive approach means that a program can provide services tailored to a specific group of children with special circumstances while also responding to a wider range of vulnerabilities.[17] A critical ingredient for successful reintegration is that programs for girls consult with and encourage young mothers' active involvement in planning and implementation.

The Integrated DDR Standards identified reintegration as the most complex phase of any DDR process. The Standards recommended that girls be involved in participatory discussions about programs designed for their reintegration and that the capacity of families and communities be developed so that they can take care of and encourage girls. These standards (IDDRS, 6.3) state:

> …the plans for the reintegration of girls should be decided with their full participation, should be shaped by what they want to do with their lives, and if applicable, should build on any skills they developed during their time in the armed force or group. Throughout, there should be a focus on encouraging girls to be independent, and developing their ability to make decisions and build up their self esteem. Girls need to be shown respect and given responsibilities and tasks valued by the community, and should be provided with education and professional training activities adapted to their situation and appropriate to the local economy. Relationships between girls and older women in the community should be encouraged if this is helpful to the girl.[18]

Although these key standards and reports are remarkably consistent in their recommendations, important questions remain about whether the recommendations are practical and how to implement them in the field. Few strong exemplars of community-based reintegration programs for girls and young mothers exist that support and encourage their active participation, are sustainable, and have been evaluated for effectiveness. This report provides such an exemplar.

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16 UNICEF (2009).

17 UNICEF (2009).

18 UN Integrated DDR Standards Sections 6.3. http://www.unddr.org/iddrs/05/30.php#18

The Participatory Action Research Project

The purpose of this project was to learn about the views of young mothers, two thirds of whom were former CAAFAG, about reintegration and to enable the young mothers to plan, implement, and evaluate their own self-designed steps to achieve their reintegration. The emphasis on mothers is timely because young mothers have been an underserved population. Although they have distinctive needs associated with their gender, reproductive status, and role as mothers, not to mention the conflicts associated with mothering outside of marriage, they have received relatively little attention in the literature on reintegration or in programming to support reintegration.

A central goal of this community-based participatory action research (PAR) project is to support the implementation of the Paris Principles by providing inputs from the field about how to do reintegration with a strong emphasis on gender and participation in different country contexts. Consistent with the Paris Principles' recommendations that girls and women should participate in program development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, this project centrally involves girls as highly-active participants who take leadership roles in reducing the powerful stigma they face through garnering local resources, and develops organizations' capacities to use participatory methods. As noted in the Paris Principles, a key to successful participation is the development of strong networks of peer support that bring young people together to "solve problems, develop social competencies appropriate to civilian life, and define their roles and responsibilities in their community."[19] By involving young mothers as key actors in changing their situations and building broad community support for this process, this PAR project has paved the way for social change of cultural attitudes and has enabled the social transformation that is part of effective reintegration. It contrasts sharply with the more widely used approach of regarding former CAAFAG as "beneficiaries" or recipients of program supports. In fact, this project was founded on the young mothers' leadership, resilience, and ability to envision what reintegration consists of and to work collectively with each other and their communities towards its achievement.

The PAR project was implemented through an academic-NGO partnership that brought together a team of 10 non-governmental organizations, three in-country academics and four Western academics. This approach is consistent with the Machel Review's recommendation that collaboration with academic institutions is a useful means of collecting the systematic evidence needed to strengthen global efforts on child protection and reintegration. Such partnerships can be instrumental in devising future strategies with greater

[19] UNICEF, 7.75 (2007).

emphasis on research and evaluation about reintegration support and informal and formal DDR, giving particular attention to children who did not participate in formal demobilization.[20] We discuss the project methods, the findings of this PAR, and the challenges to using a highly participatory process that is girl centered rather than orchestrated by agencies to achieve organizational or donor-defined objectives and outputs. Finally, we provide practice and policy recommendations based upon evidence gathered during and at the conclusion of the PAR.

The Participants

In this report, we describe a community-based participatory-action research (PAR) project involving 658 young mothers with over 1200 children living in three war-torn countries of sub-Saharan Africa — Liberia, Sierra Leone, and northern Uganda. Sixty-seven percent of the girl mother participants were formerly associated with armed forces or groups and 33 percent were other vulnerable young mothers in the community. At the time of the study, all lived in 20 communities that ranged from urban to rural sites. A substantial percentage of participants were located in communities where they had *not* lived previously (35% in Liberia, 44% in Sierra Leone, and 21% in Uganda). In fact, many were *integrating* into unfamiliar communities instead of returning to homes which may no longer exist or where they may not feel accepted. Others were living in camps for internally displaced people — especially in Uganda

In most of this report, we use the terminology "young mothers" rather than "girl mothers." Initially, our intended study population was pregnant girls and young mothers who conceived or gave birth prior to 18 years of age, both former CAAFAG and vulnerable mothers in their communities. However, the participants' average age at the beginning of the project was 21 years, with 80% of the participants between 16 and 24 years of age (range was 8 to 36 years). From a human development perspective, this somewhat older group may have had greater capacity for full participation than most mothers under the age of 18 years would have had.

Notably, many of these mothers did not know their birth dates, and verifying ages proved challenging. A small number of very young girls who were not mothers were included because they were considered highly vulnerable in the community, as were a small number of older mothers.

[20] UNICEF (2009).

Demographics of PAR Participants

Country	Site	Urban/ Rural*	% Formerly associated	% Originally from community
Liberia	**Bong**	**Rural**	**100%**	**94%**
	Buchanan	**Rural**	**71%**	**61%**
	Pipeline	**Urban**	**69%**	**23%**
	Slipway	**Urban**	**80%**	**69%**
Sierra Leone	**Binkolo**	**Rural**	**94%**	**71%**
	Freetown City Centre	**Urban**	**77%**	**12%**
	Goderich	**Urban**	**80%**	**57%**
	Kailahun	**Rural**	**94%**	**62%**
	Mamudia-Kabala	**Rural**	**100%**	**67%**
	Massam Kpaka	**Rural**	**89%**	**58%**
	Makeni	**Urban**	**79%**	**42%**
	Pujehun Town	**Urban**	**89%**	**70%**
Uganda	**Apala**	**Rural**	**15%**	**100%**
	Kalongo	**Rural**	**63%**	**100%**
	Obalanga	**Rural**	**30%**	**55%**
	Odek	**Rural**	**69%**	**92%**
	Otuboi	**Rural**	**0%**	**24%**
	Pader Town Council	**Urban**	**56%**	**94%**
	Palabek Gem & Palabek Kal	**Rural**	**19%**	**97%**
	Railways	**Urban**	**38%**	**69%**

* The urban/rural classification imperfectly describes the differences between communities, as some urban areas are primarily agricultural and some rural areas still are heavily market based. This blunt distinction should be used with care. Also, Western classifications of urban/rural may not be consistent with local meanings.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Child participation is a cornerstone of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,[21] yet high levels of participation have been difficult to achieve in practice. How difficult it is to enable meaningful participation was evident in a 2009 review[22] of 160 evaluation documents regarding community-based groups working on child protection and well being. Only a small number of programs achieved genuine child participation and enjoyed improvement in child protection as a result. Child participation was usually low to moderate and often overridden by adults — especially male adults — who dominated meetings and decision making. Further, children wanted more voice and influence in decisions. This report underscores how the idea of child participation, while embraced as desirable by the international community, is rarely implemented except at a token level. Even more unusual, is participation that gives female children voice. Participation, therefore, should be understood as a challenging learning process that requires training and mobilizing adults so they respect children's views and are prepared to give children opportunities to freely and increasingly participate in society.

At present, different child protection agencies use the term "participation" to mean different things. It may mean being given information about what is planned by the agency, as in a process of light consultation. It may also mean membership in a committee, speaking during an agency-directed focus group, or answering a questionnaire. We consider these forms to be on the low end of meaningful or genuine participation. However, some agreement does exist about what meaningful participation is:

> It involves local populations in the creation, content, and conduct of a program or policy designed to change their lives. Participation requires recognition and use of local capacities and avoids the imposition of priorities from the outside. It increases the odds that a program will be on target and its results will more likely be sustainable.[23]

Going one step further, participation may be viewed as an institutional commitment to participation as a core value that cuts across all policies and programs and vests power in the hands of local actors in decentralized, locally driven processes. Fundamentally, full participation requires faith in the capacity of people to change if they are given "wings," support in making choices on

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21 UNICEF Fact Sheet: The right to participation. http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Right-to-Participation.pdf

22 Wessells, M. (2009).

23 Jennings, R. (2000).

their own behalf, and the willingness to divest power. Yet, as noted by Jennings,

> There is a steady temptation to interfere and distrust. Half measures and ersatz participation are often the result. Practitioners who have learned lessons the hard way warn against doing anything for people they can manage for themselves.[24]

To enable meaningful participation, we took the approach of Community-Based Participatory Action Research, which is not a recipe but a family of approaches. The core of PAR approaches is that groups of people, in this case young mothers, organize themselves and define the social problem they face, develop and implement a plan for addressing the problem, and evaluate what they have accomplished. Implemented through academic-NGO partnership, this project embodied the principles that PAR:

- Enables high levels of participation.
- Is cooperative and engages community members and researchers in a joint process in which both contribute equally.
- Entails co-learning.
- Develops local systems and builds local community capacities.
- Is an empowering process through which participants can increase control over their lives.
- Achieves a balance between research and action.

Fundamental to the implementation of the PAR was a set of guiding ethical principles of "Do No Harm" that we collaboratively developed prior to the beginning of the study. During each yearly team meeting, we reviewed these principles to reflect on whether we were adhering to them and to discuss difficult situations such as community jealousies and exploitation and violence that arose at some field sites.

[24] Jennings, p. 5.

Do No Harm Principles

We understand PAR as research with the intent of community mobilization and distinctly separate from implementation of externally driven programs. We will not conduct research without planning and taking action to address local needs identified in that research. We seek to promote community participation with a focus on young mothers (formerly associated with armed groups) and their children and other vulnerable groups/girls. We will enable the empowerment of young mothers within communities in order to inspire communities to engage in social change which can impact authoritative bodies to positively influence young mothers and, ultimately, the community. We will adhere to international human rights standards. We support community consultation to develop and implement **P**articipation, **A**ction, and **R**esearch. We support:

- Local level committees to assist in respect for culture.
- Strengthening healthy and supportive cultural values but with no acceptance of cultural values that are oppressive to women and children.
- Feedback to communities with regard to research.
- Adherence to informed consent, ethical interviewing, codes of conduct, and confidentiality.
- Awareness of child protection issues and incorporation of child protection strategies.

In the PAR project described below, we found that enabling decision making by young mothers involved a highly-challenging paradigm shift from agency-centered to young mother-centered processes. Building upon participation of young mothers as central to supporting their reintegration within the context of their communities, we developed a "collaborative approach to research that equitably involved all partners in the research process and recognized the unique strengths that each brings."[25] As a team, we aimed to combine

[25] Minkler & Wallerstein, p. 6.

knowledge and action for social change to improve the situations of returning young mothers and their children by putting young mothers at the center of the work. These young mothers were responsible for identifying problems and seeking solutions, with the support and facilitation of agency partners.

At all sites, the essential first step was for young mothers to come together as a group in organized and regular meetings, share experiences, analyze and reflect upon their situations, and grow together in self confidence and self esteem. Providing space and time for these relationships to develop among the young mothers was very important. The PAR initially unfolded slowly because they needed to develop their capacities and come to trust each other, and agency partners were learning a new approach to working with communities. In each country and field site, distinct processes arose which was consistent with the project aim of encouraging culturally-appropriate and diverse approaches to implementation.

Agency partners came to understand that the "PAR [project] offered access, ownership, and control and will last longer because it started with the girls"[26] and that underlying participatory methods is an assumption of a principle of support for young mothers' empowerment and an appreciation of their resilience and capacity to solve their own problems. As the project developed, agency partners remarked upon the fundamental shift in how they worked with this population: "We got used to doing it their way."

During this process, beliefs about young mothers' limited capacity were put aside, as were tendencies to guide them too much by telling them what to do and how to do it. Ultimately, agency partners came to understand that the core of authentic participation is to "look at the best interests of the participants — not imposing something on them." The oft-quoted motto to remind ourselves about who led the design, problem solving, and decision making was, *"If it doesn't come from the girls, it's not PAR."*

By not imposing agency agendas and by having staff reflect collectively on their appropriate roles, agency partners changed and adopted more facilitative roles aimed at helping the young mothers understand diverse options and explore the consequences of their choices: "The process of change has not just been for the girls but also has been in the way we do our work, which is quite profound." Later in this report, we discuss some challenges in making this shift and disincentives for doing so, including the time and capacity building involved, preference for pre-conceived programming that donors and agencies deem more appropriate, and an excessive focus upon pre-determined outputs and immediate results.

[26] Quotes are from agency PAR partners during a meeting in Kampala, Uganda in September 2009.

Methodology of the PAR Project

In an unusual partnership, we developed myriad academic and agency collaborative relationships both internationally and within Uganda, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Four international academics, three from the United States and one from Ireland organized, coordinated, and mentored the overall study process, working closely via e-mail, phone, and in person during site visits with agency partners, national academics, field personnel, community members, community advisory committees, and young mother participants. Three African academics worked with in-country partners to oversee data collection and meet with young mothers to learn about project development at various field sites. The University of Wyoming, USA, was the lead institution responsible for fiscal and organizational oversight and assuring the protection of human subjects and adherence to ethical standards.

To lay the groundwork for this study of young mothers, two meetings (May 2005, October 2006) were held at the Rockefeller Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy[27] and a third meeting took place in Freetown, Sierra Leone in December 2006.[28] During the implementation process, we met three times as a team in Kampala, Uganda. At two of these meetings, in 2007 and 2008,[29] we were joined by girl mother delegates who came from each country and had been selected by their peers. The final meeting held in September 2009 brought together the PAR team and key government and UNICEF officials from the three African countries. Also, the academics, African and Western, met for three days in Dakar, Senegal in February 2009 to discuss data gathering and analysis. The project implementation began in November 2006 and ended in June 2009. The funding for the initial year came from the Oak Foundation, Geneva, with the final two years of funding given by Oak and Pro Victimis Foundations, Geneva.

Initially, each partner agency[30] identified communities where a substantial number of young mothers lived, both former CAAFAG and other vulnerable young mothers in the community. Next, agency partners began working with these communities through local leaders and stakeholders — both men and women. Explanations of the purpose of the PAR were given, and communities that were supportive of the study were invited to participate. Community

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27 Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation

28 Funded by UNICEF West Africa

29 Funded in part by the Compton Foundation, California, USA

30 We began with 11 partner agencies with one Uganda NGO dropping out early in the PAR. This report draws upon data gathered at 20 field sites of the 10 agencies that participated during the entire grant period. Four of our partners came from Uganda (Caritas, CPA Lira, TPO, and World Vision) four from Sierra Leone (Child Fund, Christian Brothers, Council of Churches of Sierra Leone, and National Network for Psychosocial Care) and two from Liberia (Save the Children UK in Liberia and THINK).

members along with agency personnel then began the process of identifying young mothers who were formerly associated or particularly vulnerable. When these young mothers were invited to join, the PAR was explained to them. In some field sites, after the initial young mothers became part of the PAR, they then became instrumental in enrolling other community girls in a snowball process. Approximately 30 young mothers were initially enrolled at each site, although this number expanded at many sites. All participants went through an informed consent process according to a detailed protocol developed by the academic organizers and approved through the University of Wyoming's Institutional Review Board.

Once enrolled in the PAR, a key organizational component at each site was for young mothers to come together in regular meetings that were facilitated by agency personnel. Community advisory committees — including both men and women — were established and proved of critical importance in involving the community from the onset. In some sites, community advisory committee members revolved until advisors whose interest in the project was related to possible compensation gave way to those whose primary concerns were in supporting the girls in their initiatives, sharing the wisdom of their experience (for example, advising about parenting and in decision making), and serving as liaisons with the larger community. In many sites, girl mother participants selected community advisors.

The early emphasis of the PAR was on peer group support through regularly- scheduled group meetings and activities that were facilitated by agency staff and often attended by advisors. Considerable time was needed for young mothers to come to trust each other and learn to work together. Creating space for the group to develop cohesion, to think, and to share their problems set the stage for a participatory framework because girls began to grow together and developed a sense of ownership and greater self confidence. Gradually, the young mothers developed understanding that they had responsibility for the success of the project, and ownership and control were in their hands. In addition to these formal meetings, young mothers came together informally, often cooking meals or doing washing together. As this group process unfolded, so did young mothers' empowerment to change their situations and make decisions, and leaders emerged out of the groups. Also, during the time, many sites held trainings such as in parenting, reproductive health, how to do research about their problems, literacy, and human rights.

Importantly, group development was not linear but an iterative process with many detours along the way. The guidance at these junctures provided by agency personnel and community advisory committees was critically important to support the young mothers' decision making. As the young mothers' groups

developed, agency partners simultaneously learned what participation looks like if it is nurtured. Agency partners and field workers found that a key to facilitating young mothers' empowerment was relinquishing power and control to the young mothers and having confidence that, with guidance, they could and would make sound decisions.

In the PAR sites in all three countries, young mothers worked together to learn to gather data such as by participating in focus groups, sharing what was learned, and identifying problems young mothers face. Key areas of concern included stigma, marginalization, and perceived lack of social support from family and community as barriers to their reintegration. Young mothers targeted livelihoods, health, and education as critical areas for social action. For many groups, initial efforts to change their situations began with sensitizing communities to better understand their situations. They developed dramas and songs that contained rich details about their lives in armed groups, about early pregnancy and their present situations. The dramas were a catalyst for community members to interact with the young mothers as they gathered in large numbers to listen and watch the girls act out the difficulties they faced. As communities came to better understand these challenges, they began to lend support — both emotional and practical.

> *"We did a drama about what it was like when we came back from the bush and people shied away from us. The drama also reflected the alienation that we felt when we came back…. We did our play to the community and they said that they wanted to join us and join in our activities. Before, others were shy of us, and now, they talk upright to us. We used the drama to bring those who were shy of us closer again."*
>
> *Young mother, Sierra Leone*

With small funds to support each girl and for group initiatives, young mothers began developing social actions which emphasized livelihoods. Community advisors were often influential in working with the young mothers' groups to discuss livelihoods that were most likely to be sustainable within the context of their communities. Many helped the young mothers learn skills such as bookkeeping and shared their own skills. Thus, their actions were guided by young mothers' own reflections and learning but with important input from community members. The choices they made also varied by field sites and according to rural versus more urban environments — for example, rural sites were more likely to engage in agricultural activities and group livelihood schemes. These included farming ground nuts or cassava on land provided by the community, soap making, gara tie dyeing, and rearing goats. In at least one site, girls hired boys to do the farming work while they themselves managed the business including the selling of cash crops. Several groups hired teachers to provide literacy training. Other groups began petty trading businesses funded through micro-credit. A few groups staggered projects depending upon the season of the year — for example, alternating agricultural work with marketing projects so that income was consistent. In many sites, girls used funds or income earned through petty trading or small businesses to pay for skills training and/or school fees for themselves and their children. Because of their livelihoods, they were able to feed and clothe their children so that the well being of their children was markedly enhanced. Girls at two northern Uganda sites reflected upon the findings of this report and observed that "Now that we can afford the basic needs, our children no longer suffer and are much healthier now."

Most groups maintained funds available to the entire group or sub-groups to carry out social actions. They also used group funds for emergencies such as medical crises and gifts to families suffering bereavement and to provide small loans — including to new participants. Importantly, young mothers continued with "no cost" social actions such as organizing cleaning in the community, sponsoring community gatherings, and fixing a well. These activities contributed to community well being, reduced jealousies, facilitated young mothers' sense of belonging, fostered a sense of acceptance from community towards the girls, and, in some cases, helped bring war-affected communities together. For example, in a village in Sierra Leone, community gatherings were instrumental in helping people forget the past and benefitted everyone — not just the PAR young mothers. Also, in this same community, neighboring villages were invited to participate which brought together a region headed by the same paramount chief. The young mother organizers wrote invitations and asked community members for donations to pay for dances. They then organized

the events, including food preparation. An uncle of a young mother observed that “PAR is a good program because the literacy class was very important, the picnic was very important. We all got together and we ate and danced together, and it benefitted the whole community.”

Because we were interested in what young mothers were learning and doing as a result of their participation in the PAR project, in each country young mother representatives from each site came together periodically to meet in a rotating fashion at different field sites with in-country academics facilitating these data analysis workshops. They shared experiences contributed data from their sites, and participated in trainings. These young mothers’ gatherings also provided new opportunities for participants to meet each other, develop leadership skills, and learn from one another. For some who had never left their communities, the experience of traveling to other parts of the country was new and exciting.

Data Gathering & Analysis

Verbatim transcripts from the three Kampala meetings, monthly reports from the field sites — sometimes written by young mothers — regular reports from in-country academics, and reports by the PAR organizers about their site visits provided data about the development and progress of the study. Young mothers provided additional data in the form of photos, meeting minutes, and videos of dramas. A short demographic survey of all participants was implemented in the second year of the PAR. During the final year, we systematically evaluated the PAR through field ethnography (McKay in Sierra Leone, Veale in Uganda, and Wessells in Liberia) and by administering a survey to girl mother participants.

To analyze the ethnographic data, interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed, and field notes were compiled into analytic notes and findings. McKay, Veale, Wessells and Worthen exchanged data and then met for three days in February 2010 to examine data and reach consensus about key PAR analytic findings. Using a grounded analytic approach,[31] Veale then further analyzed data to identify the most important themes and sub-themes of PAR findings. The draft report of findings was then shared with field staff and young mother participants for discussion and so that their views on the resultant analysis could be incorporated. Finally, international child protection experts reviewed the PAR project findings and recommendations and provided feedback.

The PAR survey was developed in partnership with the young mothers, agency staff, and academics (see appendix IV for details of survey methodology and results). A total of 434 participants completed the survey. This was a follow up rate from Time 1 (at project registration) of 58%, 77% and 58% of participants in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda respectively. Some of this discrepancy can be explained by attrition over the three years of the project. In some cases, surveyors were unable to locate participants on the days the survey was being implemented. Many sites had recruited new participants to replace young mothers who had left and had well in excess of 30 participants per group. However these more recent participants were not included in the survey. The survey was implemented by country-based academics who surveyed each participant in private in her community. Data were entered locally and sent to Worthen to clean and analyze using epidemiologic methods. Country level reports from the three countries contributed to this final PAR report.

[31] Glaser, Barney G & Strauss, Anselm L. (1967).

Limitations

The distinctive conditions under which this project was conducted limit one's ability to generalize to other contexts in which DDR programs are implemented. The project was conducted months and, in the West African cases, years following the participants' active exposure to armed conflict. The relatively high levels of accessibility, political stability, and trust in the project areas enabled the young mothers to have high levels of mobility, settle in places other than their area of origin, and engage in group support and livelihood activities. It is doubtful that the methodology would have applied in areas torn by active or very recent conflicts. For example, security concerns in active conflict zones may make it dangerous to convene groups of young people. Also, the slow, time intensive methodology of this project is likely ill suited for the highly fluid context of many conflict or early post-conflict settings.

Restrictions on generalizability arise also from the limited nature of the participant pool in this project. This project deliberately set out to support highly vulnerable young mothers, including former CAAFAG and other young mothers in the community. The fact that it encountered the successes described below does not mean that it is an all-purpose methodology to be used with all former CAAFAG. Conceivably, this methodology might be most appropriate in supporting young people who have been vulnerable and marginalized over a period of years and who did not benefit from other DDR supports. Nor can it be concluded that this methodology is appropriate for all vulnerable young mothers. The fact that some highly vulnerable young mothers chose to leave the project indicates that this approach, however useful, will benefit some more than others. Therefore, diverse, flexible approaches are necessary in doing DDR work.

An important limitation of this project was the absence of comparison groups. Because significant political and economic changes occurred in all three countries during the period in which the project was conducted, it is possible that some of the improvements that young mothers experienced during this project owed not to the project activities but to the changes in the wider political and economic arenas. Additional research is needed to address these and other limitations.

Getting Started in the PAR: Year One in Massam Kpaka, Sierra Leone

When Christian Brothers decided to begin the PAR project in Massam Kpaka, Pujehun District, Sierra Leone, the organization had no presence in the district. This largely rural district bordering Liberia had been heavily impacted by both the Sierra Leonean and the Liberian wars, as it is a rich mining area. Armed groups had circulated throughout the district, and many girls and young women had been abducted multiple times by different groups during the conflict.

Christian Brothers decided to hire a social worker, Martha, to move to the village to coordinate the project. Together with the agency focal person, Martha met with the village Chief, the female elected leader, the Paramount Chief, the district representative of the Ministry of Social Welfare, and several other key local leaders. These meetings happened over the course of two months, laying the groundwork for Martha to move to the community.

After fully understanding what the project was about, the village Chief invited Martha to live in the community and arranged a place for her in the home of one of the community leaders. Working with the leaders, especially midwives, Martha began visiting young mothers in the community. She spent several weeks doing home visits, meeting young mothers and their families while explaining the project and answering questions. Martha would also sit and play a portable radio in her yard in the evenings, and young mothers and their children began to congregate there together. One challenge at this point in the project was that community leaders wanted their own children, who were neither vulnerable nor formerly associated, to be registered for the project.

As the young mothers became more familiar with Martha and with the purpose of the project, they were asked to participate in the PAR and to sign the consent form. The form was explained to the entire group, and each individual could ask questions and talk with Martha or the agency focal person before agreeing to sign — a process that took several weeks. As the group solidified, they began to have more formal meetings and decided to name their group "*mu va*," which means "for us."

During this period, one of the young mothers went into premature labor. After the local midwife delivered a stillborn baby, the woman began hemorrhaging. Martha and one of the other young mothers were able to get a vehicle from a nearby town and take the young woman to the hospital an hour's drive away. Because of this prompt care, she survived. While Martha had already enjoyed goodwill in the community, her action in this crisis was viewed very positively and the young mothers in the project, particularly, began to see her as an important resource person and trusted advocate.

During the next months, the participants met regularly and talked about their problems. They addressed questions like, *"how is our situation since we returned home?"* and *"what can we do to improve our lives?"* Participants shared stories with each other about what they had experienced during the war and since they settled in the village. This is some of what they said:

- *"They call our children rebel children."*
- *"My mother asked [me] to go back to the person who impregnated me."*
- *"[They tell me] You and your child are eating all our food."*
- *"My child and I sleep in darkness because I cannot afford the cost of kerosene."*

- *"Sometimes I go to bed for two days without food."*
- *"My husband did not accept my child I had from the bush, so I sent the child to my grandmother where it died of cold."*
- *"My father is an amputee and therefore depends on me for survival; I perform menial jobs to feed the home."*

The group also invited elder women in the community to join them in their meetings and speak with them about what life had been like before the war for young mothers; some of these women were also asked to be advisory committee members. The Chief, who had been supportive from the beginning, regularly attended their meetings, encouraging them to do good work.

The participants identified many needs, but decided to focus on livelihood opportunities and literacy as their first objectives. Prior to the PAR, participants had been doing work such as going to the river to collect sand to try and sell to a nearby road construction crew or going into the woods to collect bundles of sticks to sell for firewood. These jobs required heavy labor and were very hard on their children, who often had to come with them throughout the day. While some in the group wanted to do skills training or go back to formal schooling, they were concerned about how they would support themselves and their children while they were engaged in training or school. There was a lively debate among the participants about what they should settle on, and eventually they chose to begin doing micro-credit.

The group also decided to start working in their community to reduce stigma. Their first activity towards this end was to put on a drama on the importance of sanitation for children on the occasion of Africa Malaria Day. Given the generally poor health of many of the participants and their children, with the encouragement of Christian Brothers, the group decided to set aside funds for emergency medical support.

Martha began teaching literacy classes two evenings a week in a Court Barry offered by local councilor; one of the women in the community donated note pads and pencils. After the group determined the terms of the project loans, they launched a micro-credit scheme that supported the young mothers in petty trading or small businesses. The Chief, commending the participants for their seriousness, donated a small amount of land for the young women to use for a collective groundnut farm and the participants worked together to clear the land. The young mothers also partnered with a family planning organization that was reaching the community. First the organization trained them on pregnancy and family planning and then the participants put on a drama for the community about the challenges of teenage pregnancy.

As the participants gained livelihoods, they were able to clothe and feed their children better. By the end of the first year, nineteen of their children were attending school, up significantly from before the project began. The emergency medical support had been crucial, funding care for seven young mothers and 35 of their children in the first several months of the project alone. Another challenge they encountered that year was that several of the community women who had been advising them desired to be included in the micro-credit project. With the support of the Chief and Christian Brothers, the participants and Martha were able to explain that the funds could only be used to support the young mothers, not the community advisors.

Over the next two years, the project continued and grew in strength. Small businesses were sustained and the collective farming increased, with community members giving storage space for the harvests until it was time to sell. Unlike most other communities in the PAR, Massam had a well-functioning health clinic, which the participants and their children were able to access

at low cost, and the health aide was active in teaching the young mothers about their health and how to care for their children. In the second year of the project, the group began sponsoring parties for the whole village. These parties were appreciated by the community, as they brought the entire community together. One community member put it this way, “The community is more unified because of this program. There are social activities and all kinds of activities — not just for girl mothers. They all come together, and the community is very social.”

There were many factors that contributed to the success of the PAR in Massam Kpaka, which were not present in all PAR communities. Among these were the close coordination by the social worker and agency focal person, the keen involvement of the Chief and other community leaders, and a sense of community ownership that developed early among PAR participants and those supporting them. In addition, the choice of a micro-credit scheme was well suited to the surroundings and young mothers took care to diversify their enterprises according to the local markets. The presence of a health clinic that provided quality, affordable care to the young mothers and their children meant that they were able to obtain medical care without depleting their business funds. When combined with the remarkable dedication of the participants, these factors helped facilitate sustainable reintegration for the young mothers and their children.

Key Findings

The meaning of social (re)integration for young mothers is that they and their children are accepted, respected, and included as contributing family and community members.

The young mothers in the PAR contextualized reintegration in a way consistent with the Paris Principles, which define child reintegration as "the process through which children transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation." Key elements of social reintegration that they identified were being responsible, respected, and taken seriously, and participating in reciprocal support relationships within the community. They described successful reintegration as being involved in actively improving their lives, showing good mothering and self care skills, and demonstrating behaviors consistent with community and gender norms. When these changes occurred, community acceptance increased, and stigma and discrimination decreased. Girls reported that they were perceived as "more beautiful," that name-calling stopped, and community members now saw them as "serious," and "not idle." Also, the identity of formerly associated girls became more closely tied to the group, the family and community and less with their past in armed groups.

As the capacity of young mothers to take responsibility for themselves and their children was enhanced, many girls extended their circle of care to others in the community. Those who reported in the survey that they were able to help others in their community were also more likely to report feeling respected by the community, which, in turn, resulted in their being more likely to report that they were comfortable speaking in public. In some communities, a key element of psychosocial reintegration was through young mothers' initiatives that positively changed the community's spirit — for example, by bringing all members of the community together for picnics or festivals. In Liberia, groups engaged in community cleaning as a way to "give back" for the support received from advisers and leaders and to reduce jealousy and increase goodwill. This reflects the deliberate efforts of Liberian partner agencies to show, through community clean-up projects, that the young mothers were useful and valuable members and to manage jealousies. In Uganda, a group organized themselves to visit the house of bereaved families in the community to assist and support. One group extended its membership to include disabled girls in the community so they could benefit as they themselves had. 75% of Liberians, 54% of Sierra Leoneans, and 56% of Ugandans reported being helpful to their communities (see Appendix IV for full survey results).

Participation in the PAR overwhelmingly resulted in better relationships with the broader community with 89% of young mothers reporting they felt more supported and respected.

"The girls have come up with ways to sustain their relationships with the community."

Agency partner, Kampala meeting 2009

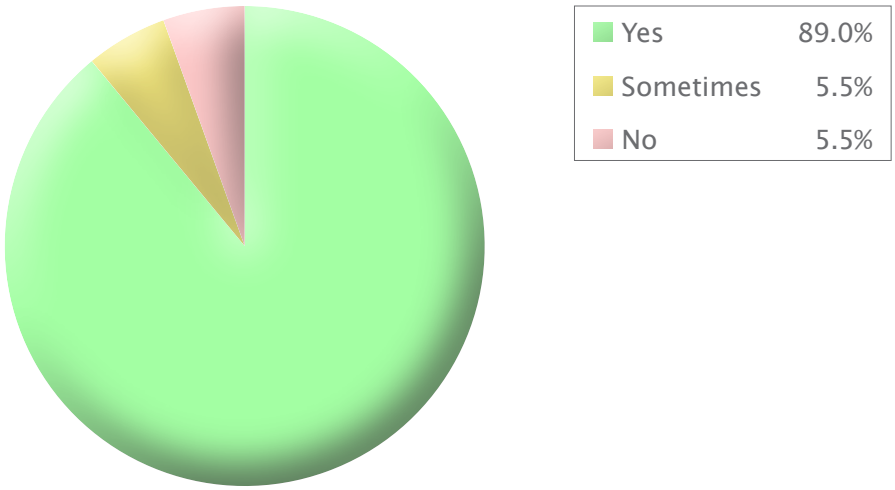
"This is community business, even though the PAR is for girls, the community is indirectly benefiting."

Agency partner, Kampala meeting 2009

"We were idle, had nothing to do after the war. We were wayward, but now with the intervention of PAR, there is a big change in our lives."

Young mother, Sierra Leone

"I feel more respected and supported by my community."



> *"There's been a big change in the young mothers' acceptance. Initially, the community saw them as fighter' wives, and even their families rejected them. Now they earn money and support their families, and communities respect them. A good example of this is that the chief gave them land to do their collective work."*
>
> *Community member, Liberia*

To facilitate social reintegration that is community based[32] and highly participatory, communities should be involved from the outset and should take ownership of the process.

From the beginning and throughout the PAR, participatory processes benefited from slow, consultative engagement at all levels of the community. Extensive community dialogue, involvement and ownership is essential to motivate influential community members to support young mothers' reintegration and ensure young mothers can effectively access and harness the potential supportive capacities of these networks for sustainable change. Therefore, PAR staff engaged in extensive dialogue with community leaders, including women elders, talked with families of participants, and sought to understand — including by consulting with participants themselves — the issues these young mothers faced in their lives.

Community advisory committees composed of both men and women who had a commitment to the young mothers' development were essential to the success of participatory processes and in facilitating their social and economic reintegration. They provided a crucial link between the young mothers' groups and the larger community and were intermediaries who encouraged the participants and supplied pragmatic advice. Also, they worked with the young mothers to manage conflict and give psychosocial support. Early in the project, some community advisory committees weren't fulfilling their roles in a helpful way. As this became apparent, they were replaced with more committed members, often chosen by the young mothers.

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[32] Community-based reintegration contrasts with the reinsertion activities featured in many DDR processes. Community-based reintegration is internally driven and a reciprocal process wherein communities accept and support former CAAFAG and other vulnerable children to achieve a place and meaningful role within communities.

A significant challenge at some sites in enabling community support for the young mothers and their children was the management of jealousies. Jealousy invariably arises in DDR projects that support former CAAFAG, drawing attention to the importance of ongoing reflection on "Do No Harm" principles in terms of being alert to interpersonal difficulties that may develop because of the young mothers' improved situations. When understanding emerged that some Ugandan young mothers' groups were experiencing jealousy, substantial effort went into thinking with girls about how to address this difficulty within the realization that the communities where these girls live are full of poverty so that when members see the girls are better off, jealousy can result. With agency staff facilitation, some groups came up with strategies such as doing volunteer work to benefit the community, mobilizing community leaders to advocate for understanding and support, or making an offering of the proceeds of their social action work (e.g. a piglet) to the community. An example from Sierra Leone involved inviting boyfriends and family members to attend the young mothers' meetings, which helped defuse jealousy. This illustrates how local leaders and advisory committee members play key roles in managing these issues. A significant lesson is that an inclusive approach should be used whenever possible in carrying out a project such as this one.

Important to note may be a slightly contradictory finding that 12 percent of young mothers said community members think worse of them, compared to before the PAR. Ugandans reported being thought of as worse by community members significantly more often than Sierra Leoneans or Liberians. In Uganda, 30 percent of young mothers reported "yes, community members do think worse of me" and 49 percent said "no." Jealousy was cited as a reason for this, and often specific family members or neighbors were identified as the ones who thought worse of the participant. Only 2 percent of Liberians and 1 percent of Sierra Leoneans reported that community members thought worse of them after joining the project. Interestingly, Ugandans who reported jealousy still mostly answered affirmatively to the question about more respect by community members.

Community Dynamics, Unintended Consequences & Jealousy

In order to avoid excessive targeting of CAAFAG, the project included both formerly associated young mothers and other vulnerable young mothers in the community. Throughout the project, older women, other girls, young fathers and community advisers expressed interest in being enrolled in the project. Inevitably, instances of community jealousy emerged which manifested in different ways.

At one Ugandan site, participants decided to rear pigs and they undertook some of the hard physical labor needed to construct their piggery. An outbreak of Hepatitis E amongst pigs in a distant community lead to a rumor spreading that these young mothers had made a bad decision and it would result in bringing harm to the community. When investigated further, participants reported that a group of young men from the community were responsible for spreading the rumor and creating this tension as a result of jealousy. They became very demoralized and questioned their own competency and decision-making and began to feel they had made a mistake in their project choice. This was a challenging time for the project staff member as the group was in danger of collapsing due to self-blame

and loss of confidence. The project facilitator brought in expertise on animal husbandry to teach the young mothers about the proper care of pigs. An influential local leader also advocated with community members on the young mothers' behalf.

Cases such as this one helped the project team to recognize early on the importance of awareness of and reflection on community dynamics. Monthly reports and regional meetings became venues for building this awareness and for developing shared creative strategies for managing these tensions. A key lesson learned is that jealousies and other negative unintended consequences cannot be allowed to happen without any response. Active strategies for managing problems when they arise and for working proactively to prevent such problems need to be developed by the young mothers, key community members, and program staff.

"It's when the community sees the project as theirs and beneficial to the entire community that good things happen."

Community member, Liberia

"When there are conflicts within the group, we always come to the advisers to unite us and make us a family. If it wasn't for the advisers, there would be no group... they also help us to show respect to each other and to elders in the community."

Young mother, Uganda

Peer groups for young mothers are instrumental in providing psychosocial support for positive coping and social reintegration.

Group processes formed the bedrock of social reintegration as it was within the group that formerly associated young mothers and other vulnerable young mothers in the community learned to talk with and listen to each other in respectful ways, manage conflict, engage in collective problem solving, and give each other support. These behaviors, in turn, generalized to their families and communities because changes in one domain of young mothers' lives — such as in building friendships — then stimulated changes in other areas. As observed by young mothers from Uganda who responded to this report's findings: "The group discussions, family visits and involvement of the advisory committee helped a lot to settle disputes between the girls and their relatives and to get them accepted at home."

The strongest psychosocial impacts of the project may be the realization of commonalities of experience: a sense that "I am not alone." Although initially some groups were characterized by mutual distrust, they gradually became cohesive as participants worked together, prepared food, met each other's families, and socialized. Within the groups, young mothers shared their problems and moved to a sense of common purpose as they realized that they faced similar problems and challenges of community stigma, familial rejection and inability to provide for their own needs and those of their children. Recognition existed that if the group failed, all members would lose the opportunity to participate in the PAR. This emergent sense of collective responsibility became the "glue" that gave many groups cohesion and solidarity. Groups gave themselves names such as "Togetherness" and "Girl Mothers Without Borders."

In the absence of initial material support, attendance at group meetings became intrinsically rewarding for many young mothers as they valued the group support. For others, barriers to regularly attending group meetings affected their participation and continuation in the PAR. These included difficulties in finding childcare, long distances and expenses for travel to meetings, lack of food, and/or poor health. In addition, many participants who dropped out in the early stages of the PAR may have been motivated only because of hopes of material support from partner agencies, expecting immediate tangible assistance. They also may not have valued or needed the psychosocial support offered by the group. Others may have been too vulnerable or marginalized to participate. Although some girls who "dropped out" did so because of personal, family, or financial reasons, more systematic research has the potential to illuminate processes that support young mothers' continued engagement with the group.

Overall, 91% of participants reported feeling involved in what the group was doing, 4% said they sometimes felt involved, and 5% said they did not feel involved in what the group was doing.

> *"Togetherness [is] sharing experiences between formerly-abducted and community girls."*
>
> *Young mother, Uganda*
>
> *"Slow at first, giving space for it to develop was very important."*
>
> *Young mother, Sierra Leone*
>
> *"Sometimes the gara group would cook together, eat together, and it helped us be one, and even helped us solve problems."*
>
> *Young mother, Sierra Leone*

Young mothers' peer groups are fostered by organizing, structuring, and expert facilitation by agency staff, whose ongoing aim is to shift decision making to the young mothers.

The promotion of high levels of participation proved to be challenging for agency staff accustomed to making programming decisions. Participatory processes necessitated shifting control and ownership to young mothers themselves through supportive and highly skilled facilitation, which required agency staff to learn new approaches. Agency staff found that organizing and facilitating young mothers' groups and providing psychosocial support required significant investment of time. Most importantly, agency staff needed to demonstrate their respect for the young mothers' ideas. As the staff enabled their empowerment, the girl mothers began to drive the process, made decisions about the use of resources, and experienced a growing sense of group purpose and ownership. Innovative and creative individual or group projects began to emerge which resulted in differentiated and flexible activities. As staff engaged in dialogue with young mothers, they advised them, identified capacity building needs, and introduced training in a timely and appropriate

way. Core training at many sites included managing group dynamics, conflict resolution skills, health care, bookkeeping, literacy and numeracy, and business skills.

Through ongoing dialogue and conflict resolution, young mothers came to understand over time that because ownership of the project lay with them, they were responsible for outcomes and to each other and were also accountable to agencies and donors. This marked a key shift in the group dynamics as young mothers realized that they had real power and decision-making responsibility and their efforts resulted in real change in their life conditions. With this transition, young mothers began experiencing individual and collective empowerment. This project therefore provides support for the idea that this extremely vulnerable group is capable of doing research, participating fully, and developing economic skills, as long as they have good support.

Empowerment[33] includes increasing spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities and, among other results includes developing confidence, pride of accomplishment. Three overlapping and key components of empowerment are personal (developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity and undoing effects of internalized oppression), relational (developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it), and collective (individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact). Thus importantly in the context of this project, empowerment is not only about what an individual experiences but is relational and collective.

> *"We give support, giving people time to think is a very important aspect of programming."*
>
> *Agency partner, Sierra Leone*

[33] Rowlands, J. (1997); Worthen, M. et al. (2010).

"What I saw immediately, is these girls began mobilizing themselves. They totally sacrificed their time, not demanding any payment... They maintained their spirit. Some hope was coming from somewhere. Then it came to identifying their priorities they said 'we want a restaurant' because that's what we can do ourselves. When I saw that spirit, they are now embracing ownership.... If it was not their choice, the project would have died by now."

Community leader, Uganda

Young mothers' group work facilitates their reintegration through increasing their strength and improving their capacity to be seen and heard in communities.

The PAR project benefitted from slow development at the field sites without an emphasis on quick and measureable outputs. Young mothers mobilized to form peer groups and developed their own processes. Simultaneously, agency partners learned principles and practices of highly participatory approaches to reintegration. The project had funds for use to support young mothers' social action initiatives at each field site, and these funds were available incrementally as they identified social actions and a need for funding support developed. As the focus was not centrally on monetary resources, the relationships within the young mothers' group and between the groups and the agency personnel were strengthened independent of the financial resources. For example, many groups began by developing dramas to present in their communities to share their experiences and educate the community about their situations.

When money was more fully provided for individual and group social actions (usually 6 to 12 months after the PAR began and again the following year), young mothers came to recognize that small money could go a long way: "So little ended up helping so much. The little you gave me made me want to take better care of myself. I now try to get good clothes and wash my skin and brush my hair and eat good food. The little bit you gave me made me try harder." Another girl mother said that "The money itself was not such a big deal, but from within I feel a change. The money I make now is not for drinking or smoking."

When organized in groups, young mothers were more visible, had a stronger voice, and were better able to access community resources and withstand external threats, like jealousy or criticism by some community members. Mobilization of community structures to support young mothers' social reintegration was possible because of the group structure and identity. For many groups, peer support therefore allowed for increased reintegration in the community through activities they initiated. In responding to the findings of this report, young mother from two sites in Uganda said that as groups they could complain to the community and their relatives about the way they and their children were being mistreated and discriminated against — which they could not do individually.

Groups are better able to cultivate relationships with more powerful people who can support and advocate for them. As groups, they demonstrated their seriousness and commitment to their activities, which brought respect. They were able to mobilize influential people in their communities to represent their interests and make requests at official levels. For example, young mothers' groups made linkages with district councils and other community leaders that individual young mothers would have had difficulty making. This, in turn, facilitated levels of organizing and networking that would not have been possible if young mothers had participated as loosely-associated individuals. As a result of this networking and community mobilization, community members became willing to engage with the young mothers, thereby improving the relationships between the young mothers and their communities. In some cases, groups used their status as a recognized entity in the community to advocate for more support (e.g., a larger plot of land for their restaurant business) or approached other organizations for investment in their activities. Because of the confidence many young mothers developed in their groups, they then were able to express themselves in public such as during community meetings, with officials, to visitors, and through participation at the PAR team meetings in Kampala. Four-fifths (81.3%) of young mothers responded positively to the statement: "Through participating in the group, I can now speak in public more easily."

"One would like to pour resources where there is seriousness."

Agency partner, Sierra Leone

Economic livelihood supports are instrumental in improving young mothers' family and community status and relationships. Sustainability is strongly related to flexibility and diversification in income generating activities.

Funds provided through the project facilitated young mothers to organize within their groups to define their priorities. With the advice of project facilitators at each site, they then identified social actions (such as community dramas) and income generation activities that were achievable with locally available, low cost, sustainable resources. Financial resources were introduced on a phased basis during the project so that groups initially consumed partial amounts of their social action money. Thus, if their chosen activities were unsustainable, the young mothers were able, with agency staff and community advisory committee help, to reflect on the failure, assess skill gaps and training needs, and then develop more effective, sustainable initiatives.

Within their groups, young mothers engaged in problem solving in relation to situations that arose within the group such as lazy and/or dishonest members. For example, at one site participants were found to be stealing group funds from their restaurant business, and the members decided that they could no longer be members of the group. Also, some boyfriends were found to be eating food for free and thus profits disappeared; the group intervened to stop this behavior. The PAR project was thus an iterative process whereby participants devised actions, tried them, revised them, and found better approaches that improved sustainability of livelihoods. A significant project outcome was that many groups felt their activities were sustainable and felt more positively about the future, although recognizing many ongoing challenges.

Importantly, young mothers who decided to use their funds to enroll in school or pursue skills training did best when they simultaneously engaged in group or individual livelihoods. This was because continuing school or training was often fraught with impediments — most principally financial barriers but for other reasons such as pregnant girls not being allowed to attend school after their pregnancy was evident (in Sierra Leone), not finishing a skills training course with a certificate of completion, or finishing training but not having start-up kits. If these young mothers also had sustainable livelihoods, they were still able to meet basic needs for themselves and their children, pay children's school fees, and some were able to continue paying for their school or training fees after the PAR ended.

Livelihood Activities Adopted by PAR Participants

- Petty Trading (charcoal, kerosene, flour, second hand clothes, food produce, etc.)
- Food Vending
- Community Farming/Group Gardening
- Frozen Fish Shop (failed)
- Restaurants (some succeeded to an exceptional level, some failed)
- Soap Making
- Bakery (some successful, some failed)
- Hair Braiding/Hair Dressing
- Cultural Dancing for Parties/Events (sometime hire young men for drumming)
- Goat Rearing
- Piggery
- Gara Tie Dyeing & Weaving
- Grinding Mill
- Knitting (failed)
- Beadwork (jewelry making)
- Bicycle Repair Shop (rental of bicycle pumps, puncture repair, small equipment hire)
- Nursery School (trained as a nursery teacher and started small nursery school)
- Agriculture (groundnuts, cassava, maize, etc. Some failed due to weather; some very successful and generate large income)

Enhanced economic ability to support families often opened the way for improved relationships. Also, sometimes improved relations with families facilitated economic success and improved ability to give back to families. As a result of their engagement in individual and group income-generation activities, almost 75 percent of participants reported that their income enabled them to be supportive to their family by buying basic necessities. Only a minority of participants (10.2 percent) said they were unable to be socio-economically supportive to their families. Reasons included that they did not earn enough money or have the capacity to sustain their income generation activities. As a caveat, sometimes financial independence became a source of conflict such as when families attempted to control the money and criticized the young mothers for having become "too big." Some agency partners cautioned young mothers not to be prideful with respect to the positive gains they had achieved.

> *"Before, I could not buy anything for my child or for myself — not paraffin or soap, and my parents were not loving her, saying 'we are feeding you and your child.' When I got this business, I surprised them. At my family level, I would ask for some money to buy something for my child and myself, and they would shout at me. Now, it is the other way round. I can take care of my own child, can join in the family and can contribute; now they accept 'this one is my daughter' and call me daughter. Before this, they called me names."*
>
> *Young mother, Uganda*

Emergent in the findings is a sense that as young mothers become more economically self-sufficient, family acceptance and love increased. Ethnographic evidence suggests it would be simplistic to interpret this simply in economic terms, that is, once girls and their children are no longer an economic burden, tensions within the family and with the community decrease and greater acceptance occurs. In the first year of the project, little or no financial support was provided at many sites, and yet participants reported that they were happier, experienced more support from their group, and had improved hygiene. As their self-esteem, positivity and hope for the future transformed, they contributed to creating a better "atmosphere" in families and communities and evoked more positive responses and support. Also, economic self-sufficiency did more than remove any bitterness over their former dependency, as it opened up an array of positive effects. Self-sufficiency allowed young mothers to fulfill their expected roles and responsibilities as daughters and mothers. In many respects, it enabled them to earn a new place or role in family and community and to recreate their identities away from fighters or "rebel wives" toward those of mothers and citizens. Thus, this "economic" finding needs to be understood holistically in terms of the overall transformative changes observed in young women and their children and in their relationships with their families and community members.

The sustainability of income generation activities depended on numerous factors, including whether the activities were economically viable. Aside from this key factor, strong individual or group ownership motivated girls to work hard and invest in their business. Leadership structures and roles introduced by the girls to manage their group processes enhanced their management of social actions. Also, having power and control over resources accruing from their work enabled them to meet their own priorities and interests. Literacy and numeracy were identified as critical skills to enhance sustainable livelihoods, especially in West Africa. Also in West Africa, young mothers at many sites prioritized education.

Young mothers in urban sites appeared to find sustaining livelihoods more challenging. They faced stiffer competition, and their activities were strongly affected by daily fluctuations in international exchange rates and market conditions which required that girls have skilled microfinance advice as they made choices. This required agency staff or local partners to be knowledgeable in microfinance which was variable according to site. For example, at one Uganda site, girls chose knitting and sewing projects but the products produced were of low quality and the market for these goods was extremely limited. Consequently, the project was abandoned. A key area for ongoing learning therefore is identification of the reasons some project staff members

were far more skilled than others and could therefore facilitate better decision making by the young mothers. As an example, at one urban site where girls did not have a high level of advice, all young mothers who chose to do a small business decided upon fruit selling and ended up competing with each other. With a very limited market for the fruit, some girls broke away from the group's decision and started a different business on their own.

Rural sites tended to be characterized by more group and community cohesion, diversified economic opportunities (cultivation, petty trading, other), and greater access to and stronger relationships with community networks and leaders. Our evidence suggests that in rural sites community leaders, neighbors, and families often contributed land, labor, and harvest help — and, at one Sierra Leone site, they provided storage space for agricultural products. Therefore, community members in some of these rural sites may themselves have been more personally invested in the project.

A number of sustainable models emerged during the project such as opening bank accounts as a group or individually, linking the young mothers to pre-existing community or women's groups, and facilitating them to register their group as a community-based organization. This would make the group eligible for certain funding opportunities. At some sites, young mothers came up with their own governance guidelines which enabled this transition into local associations.

Young mothers appeared to do better when they had business, health and life skills training and skilled advice about diversifying so that they had other options if one choice was not sustainable. The importance of flexibility and diversification in income generation activities therefore emerged as an important lesson learned. Girls who diversified their businesses could then shift with changing market conditions and had several ways to earn livelihoods

such as selling item A one week and item B the next according to conditions. Many young mothers identified a good niche market that was innovative, low technology, and not dependent on continued external resourcing. For example, at one of the Sierra Leone rural sites, a young mother went regularly to Freetown to buy goods unavailable in her small community — such as purses — and sold them locally. Combined with peer group projects that changed seasonally to accommodate community markets, she was able to earn enough income to pay for her schooling and that of her children. Further, the group developed a savings plan for emergencies and loans. When interviewed in November 2009, this young mother said she hoped to enroll in law school, although funding was clearly lacking.

The amount of funding given to the girls varied according to agency-developed budgets. Funds given generally ranged from $100 to $300 per participant over the course of project. The specific use of the funds (for example, school, training, agricultural supplies, purchase of goats, a group project) and when support was given varied by site. Although a seemingly small amount by Western standards, the funds provided were significant in the context of the average national per capita income, which in 2008 was $388 in Liberia, $782 in Sierra Leone, and $1,166 in Uganda.[34]

A complex facilitation task for agency staff was to balance the need for young mothers to make their own decisions with proven effective practices such as conducting a proper market analysis in the development of a business plan. A tension existed between enablement of young mothers' decision-making and effective practice in the field of livelihoods. Although advice was given by staff and advisory committee members about which income generating activities and strategies make sense according to local markets, in most cases no proper market analyses were conducted. This occurred because of concern that engaging the young mothers in a market analysis may have reflected too much adult guidance in a project that aimed to maximize young mothers' participation. A key lesson for ongoing learning is to develop market analyses that also enlist participation and decision making by young mothers about which economic pathways to pursue.

A significant lesson that emerged from the project is that psychosocial support of young mothers enhances the probability that livelihoods will be sustainable. Young mothers encouraged and helped each other to continue or to be inventive in their approaches — such as at one site where the young mothers hired boys and men to plant and harvest groundnuts while they

[34] These figures are from the World Bank database on world development indicators, downloaded 6 June, 2010 from http://go.worldbank.org/45B5H20NV0

themselves managed the selling of the crop. They strategized together with the advice of facilitators who, in best-case scenarios, had the expertise to guide them in appraising local markets and making sound decisions. Because economic livelihoods are critical to their successful reintegration, a key area for future research is to better understand how psychosocial supports and facilitation by project coordinators enhances the sustainability of livelihoods and what forms are most salient — such as peer group support and market analyses that are guided by adult expertise but involve young mothers in implementation.

> *"These are ambitious girls, they talk a lot about where they will be in five years. They have great plans and are confident."*
>
> *Agency partner, Uganda*
>
> *"Yes, we have come this far, but there is much to be done if we are to be sure of our future. We are proud to be here, but we want to go beyond. We want to reach a better point."*
>
> *Young mother, Liberia*

The Ups and Downs of a Ugandan Restaurant: A Case Study of a Group Livelihood Project

In one site in Uganda, after much discussion to rank order their priorities, the young mothers decided that income generation was a key priority. The participants decided they wanted to do something that was within their capacity where they would not need to rely on external people and so they decided to open a restaurant with their social action funds. The local leader donated a small house in a central location in their rural village. He said that he had watched from a distance as he saw the girls meet in their group every week for over a year, and saw that this was their idea and that they were serious about their initiative and decided to support them.

The group organized themselves and began by making chapatti and tea in the mornings and beans, rice and chicken for lunch and evenings. The business developed slowly. There were early problems of low quality food, boyfriends eating from the restaurant for free, and babies urinating on the floor of the restaurant, which all had a negative impact. However, local people advised the girls. Following health training, girls knew more about the importance of hygiene. The local leader that initially donated the small house stopped by for his lunch each day and gave critical feedback on what needed improving if they were to keep their customers.

However, core tensions began to emerge in the group as some young women felt they were carrying more of the work and cooking than those that lived far away, and observed a lack of commitment by some young mothers, who often came late. More seriously, a lack of record keeping meant little transparency by the group leaders and some felt that they were being dishonest. The project was in danger of collapsing.

Organizational staff responded quickly with training on book-keeping which was important but did not address the bad feeling that had developed within the group. Recognizing the seriousness of the problem, the advisory members stepped in and said they would take over running the restaurant for a short period and the group had to meet and come up with a solution to their issues. Within the group, they also recognized that if the project failed, it was everyone's loss. In their group, they decided the members that had stolen from the group should be asked to leave the group and that would go a long way towards resolving issues of trust. One young woman came up with the idea that the group should hire one person to do the cooking and the group members would serve the food and manage the business.

The business has survived and the group has now very significant group savings that they are using for individual loans. The advisory committee is still very involved in monitoring and supporting the restaurant and the group and there are plans, supported by the local leader to develop a hotel.

This example contrasts with another restaurant opened by a different group in Uganda. When that restaurant failed to make a profit, the group project changed to individual petty trading which was more successful. Key issues encountered by both restaurants were a lack of transparency by the leaders, rumor mongering, poor reception of customers and lack of record keeping. The critical difference between the two examples was the degree of motivation and involvement of local leaders and advisers to stand in solidarity with the girls in all their difficulties and provide mentoring throughout as the participants decided how best to proceed.

Family relationships are significantly improved through young mothers' participation in the PAR project.

A fundamental element of familial reintegration centers on young mothers' enhanced capacity to engage in caring, supportive relationships as a support giver, not only as a seeker or receiver of support. This transformed many of their social interactions from those defined by need and victimhood to reciprocal support which, in turn, fostered positive identity transformation and respect and enhanced social reintegration. A core reason was because of their increased ability to support their own children both materially and through proper care taking and make contributions to the overall well being of the family. Increasingly as the project developed, young mothers fulfilled role expectations of a good mother, daughter, and girlfriend or wife.

The result was enhanced status, acceptance, love, belonging, and respect within the family. Increased family acceptance was also linked to being purposeful and not idle, not "fussing," and attending to their small businesses rather than to relationships with men as a source of economic support. Those who reported an increase in family love were also more likely to report giving better care to their children and support to their families in meeting basic needs and helping others in the community. As observed by Ugandan young mothers who responded to findings of this report, "When your relatives see that you no longer ask them for money for your children's upkeep, they start to like you and the children because you are not a burden — which makes you free and happy at home."

The majority of young mothers who responded to the survey reported that "Involvement in the PAR has made me and my children more liked or loved by my family." Comparatively, 93 percent, 89 percent, and 80 percent of Liberians, Sierra Leoneans and Ugandans reported increase in family love.

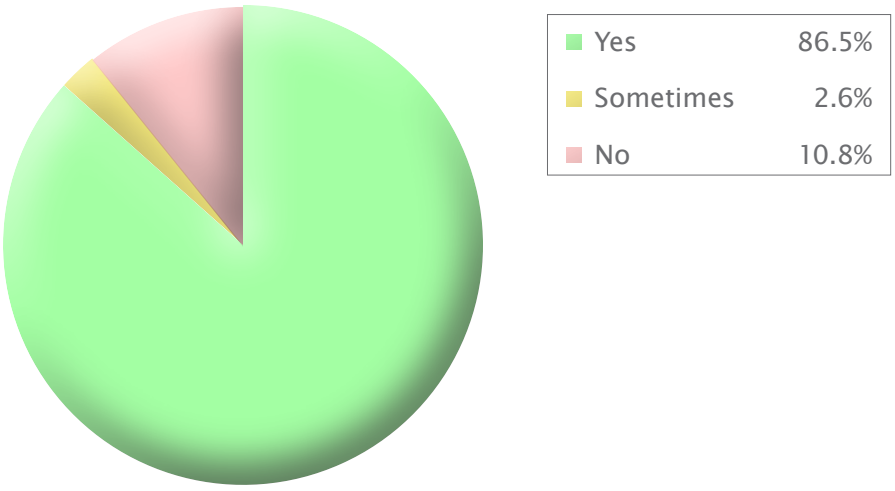
"From my little business, I was able to give small support for food at home. My parents asked me how I was able to earn it and began to respect me."

Young mother, Sierra Leone

"(PAR) allowed the families to accept the girls back as they started to see them as productive members of the community."

Agency partner, Kampala meeting 2009

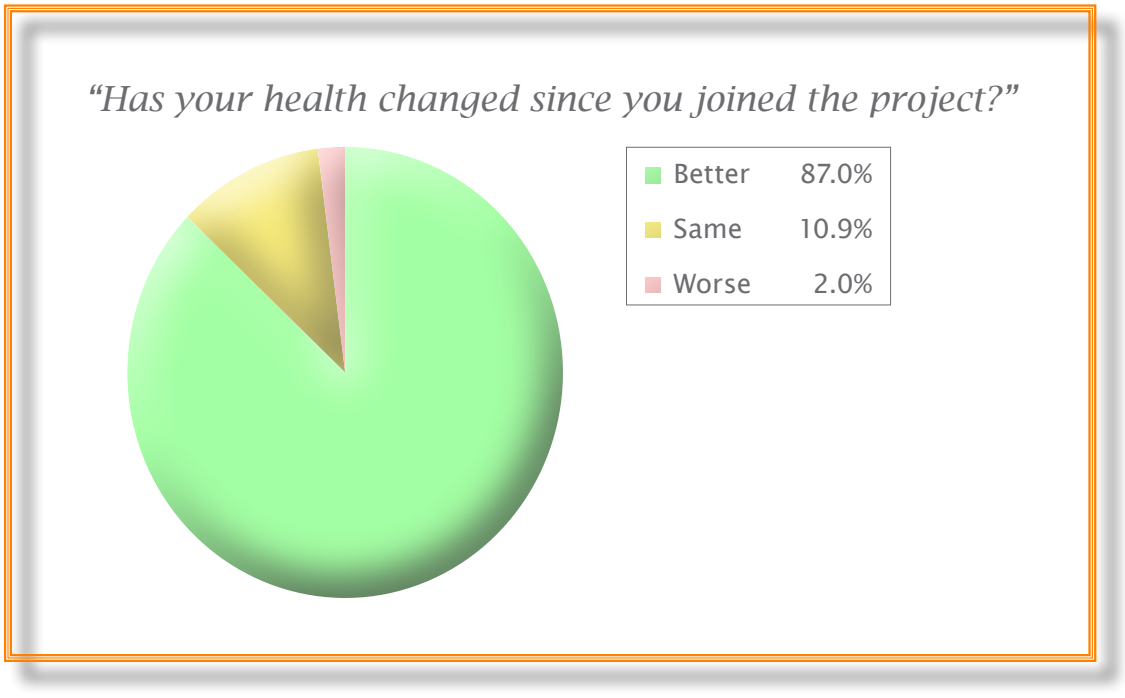
"Involvement in the PAR has made me and my children more liked or loved by my family."



Young mothers show improved physical & psychological well being.

In our three study countries, young mothers' emotional and behavioral problems were reduced over the project lifespan. Further, they exhibited better self-care and psychological well being and showed greater confidence and self-efficacy. Across the three study countries, 87 percent of young mothers reported that their health had improved compared to before the project, with no significant differences by whether participants were associated/not associated or by country. Improvements were due to a number of factors. Increased income meant participants were better able to access health clinics and pay for medicine. Through their agency networks, a number of participants received subsidized health care. In Uganda and in some West African sites, a substantial health education program — in which content was developed to address the health priorities identified by girls themselves — led to behavioral changes such as better ways to look after their children and improved hygiene and health.

Despite the improvement, the majority of young mothers lacked sufficient access to primary health care, and cost of health care impacted the progress many were making with livelihoods. When a major health crisis occurred for themselves or their child, young mothers sometimes used their business capital to pay for care. This, in turn, resulted in some losing their businesses and, in a small number of cases, the young mothers dropped out of groups as, for example in a Sierra Leone project site, they felt ashamed about their inability to maintain their livelihoods or to pay back loans obtained from the group — despite group members visiting them and inviting them to return.



Unwanted pregnancies remain a challenging issue for many young mothers.

At many field sites, young mothers welcomed the opportunity to learn about family planning and contraceptive choices. They highly valued this information, as they often did not know basic information about prenatal care to maximize the chances of a healthy pregnancy and options available to prevent unwanted pregnancy. However, despite accessing this information, many young mothers continued to face challenges in preventing unwanted pregnancies.

Across the three participating countries, two-thirds of young mothers reported that they were able to prevent unwanted pregnancies. However, a quarter of participants reported that they become pregnant even when they do not want to. There is a significant difference by country, with 62.5 percent of Liberian young mothers endorsing "yes" or "sometimes" to the statement, "I get pregnant even when I do not want to." Participants provided explanations for why they thought they had difficulty preventing pregnancy. The most common explanations were that they could not afford birth control, oral contraceptives failed, that their husbands or boyfriends did not support them using any form of birth control, or that they did not have knowledge about how to prevent pregnancy.

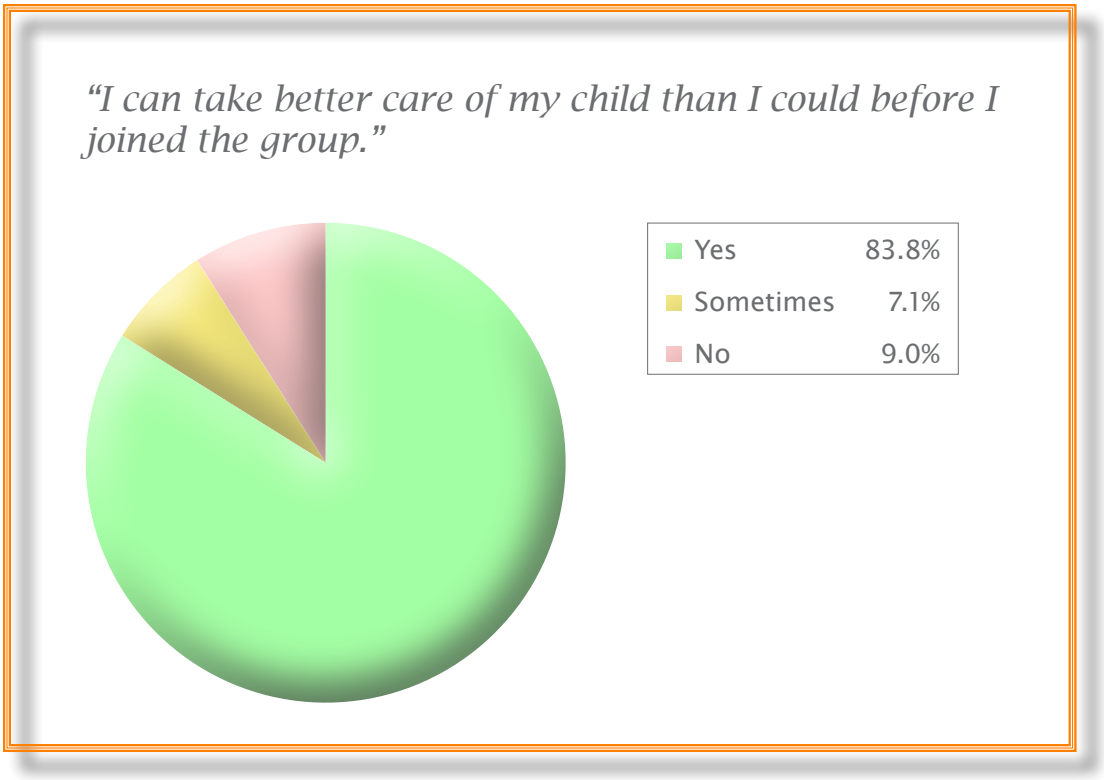
Six young mothers reported having three babies since the beginning of the PAR. They were much more likely than participants who had only one or two children during the PAR to say that they did not experience an increase in family love and their children's health had not improved. No additional relationship were observed between the number of babies born during the project and family love or children's health when women reported only having one or two babies during the PAR.

Children of young mothers show improved well being, which facilitates their social reintegration.

The children of young mothers achieved increased acceptance and belonging within the family and by members of the community. As the young mothers' capacity to care for their children improved, transformation occurred within the atmosphere of family homes. This transformation owed to the increased capacity of young mothers to provide economically for their children's needs and also because young mothers had greater pride in their children and showed increased understanding about how to care for their children.

Young mothers reported that they were better mothers, and their children's health status had improved. Responding to the findings of this report, Ugandan young mothers from two sites said that, "Now that we can afford the basic needs, our children no longer suffer and are much healthier." Community members also commended changes in the young mothers' ability to care for

their children. Interestingly, a positive spinoff effect was that as young mothers improved self-care and the care of their children, in some communities they became role models for others who imitated their behaviors. Approximately 80 percent of participants reported that they were better able to take care of their child or children compared to before the project had begun. These percentages were similar across the three countries.



Four-fifths of survey respondents reported that the health of their child or children had improved compared to before the project. This was a result of young mothers' increased capacity to provide health care for children, better health education, improved hygiene, and feeding and care of children. Interestingly, those reporting that their children's' health had improved also said they were better able to care for their children. In total, 83.7 percent of young mothers reported the health of their child or children was better; 14.3 percent reported child health was the same, and 1.9 percent reported child health was worse than before the project.

Changing Perceptions of Young Mothers' Children

Ethnographic research in the project documented the initially negative stereotypes of children who had been born to CAAFAG in the bush. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, families that were already in desperate need of food had negative attitudes toward such children, saying things such as "we're not here to care for 'bastards' and other people's children."

Boy children of single mothers in Uganda were sometimes called "hyenas" within their mothers families and the wider community, whether mothers were formerly abducted or not, whether children were conceived in captivity or in civilian communities. In a group discussion in an IDP camp in Langi region, young mothers discussed meanings of the term hyena to denote a boy born to a single mother. These young women stressed that hyena was a term only used for boys, not girls and that the hyena are destructive — just eats and never gives. Young mothers understood the use of this term against boys of single mothers in the maternal family as emanating from the following fears and tensions surrounding them: 1. They are an expense to the family, 2. Their father is not there to support them, and 3. They may try to inherit from that family leaving other "real" children of the family with nothing.

Female children in Uganda are protected from this particular form of name-calling because of the existence of a bride price system, whereby a family is compensated for the loss of a valued girl rather than compensating her husband's family for taking responsibility of her. A number of young mothers in the PAR discussed plans to purchase small areas of land for their own compound and gardens so that their children would not depend on inheritance from their own family. It seems that children conceived within the Lord's Resistance Army are not as vulnerable

as previously feared, and many have developed supportive relationships with their mothers, extended family members and people living in the community.

In Uganda, formerly associated young mothers discussed the particular needs of children who returned when they were older and thus had witnessed violence and experienced hardship in the Lord's Resistance Army. Advice that they offered included "talking softly" to your child, "showing him not to hurt," teaching the child and creating a safe home environment. Difficulties in the community with respect to children tended to be related to stress and poverty that characterize life in the IDP camps — negative talk towards children born in armed groups occurred in some cases when neighbors did not have enough food to feed an extra child, or if a child misbehaved when playing with other children. Young mothers described these sites of tension as common to all children of single mothers, who may be in a more vulnerable position socially, and suggested that these actions were episodic — the same person who criticizes a child in one situation will treat them well, have them to play with their children and feed them other times.

Positive change in the perceptions of the children occurred in many cases throughout the duration of the PAR. Often a transformation occurred within the family, and this opened the door to changed perceptions by the community. As stated by a Liberian young mother, "My children were not in school. Now they're in school. My family respects me because I can provide." She also reported that because she was respected, her children were accepted and treated as well as other children, not only in her family but in the community as well. In general, family acceptance of the children appeared to be a significant influence on whether the community will treat the children with respect.

Changes that rippled out from family to neighborhood were also evident in cases where mothers' improved capacities to care for their children led to behavior changes that improved relations with neighbors and respect for both the mothers and the children. In Uganda, one young mother said that as she learned about the importance of good hygiene for children's health, she taught her children not to defecate in public areas. This was noted and appreciated by family members and neighbors and reduced tensions over the children's behavior.

However, the young mothers' children continue to face many challenges. Where resources are particularly limited, family members, particularly new husbands or boyfriends, seem to single out children born during the war, treating them worse than other children in the family.

"Before the project, the girls' children were seen as different, but now they're seen as positive, and other [community] members allow their children to befriend them."

Community member, Liberia

"Now there is a difference from before. She can buy clothes for her baby. The baby used to remain dirty and is now well-dressed. She can go to the health centre, buy drugs, she has business and when she is told to buy this kind of drug for the baby, she can do it herself. Hygiene is well-kept, she has learnt to take care of the baby, what kind of food is good for the baby, now the baby is less sickly."

Grandmother, Uganda

Gender relations are complex. While some young mothers report supportive relationships, the majority say they do not experience their boyfriends/husbands as supportive of them or their children.

For the young mothers in the project, supportive relationships with male partners and fathers of their children involved both economic and emotional support. Critical areas of economic support for children that participants identified were when fathers/partners paid for children's medical expenses, school fees, food, and clothing. Emotional support included partners caring for and playing with their children. Among the 16.2 percent who reported that their boyfriends or husbands were sometimes supportive, the most common descriptions were either of male partners who provided sporadic and unreliable economic support or who occasionally took time to emotionally care for the children. Across the three countries, only 33.3 percent of young mothers reported that their boyfriends or husbands were supportive of their children.

In all three countries, young mothers reported conflict with their boyfriends and husbands; they left boyfriends or husbands because of domestic violence and/or discrimination against their children not conceived with their current partner. In Sierra Leone, young mothers in at least two field sites identified being forced to have sex with their boyfriends or husbands as key problems. Many young mothers with unsupportive partners in Uganda and West Africa reported being abandoned. Young mothers in all countries reported that their partners had died or were financially unable to support their children, often due to unemployment. In all countries, there were examples of current male partners who were supportive of their biological children but unsupportive of children born from prior relationships, including children born while a young mother was associated with an armed group.

> *"The boyfriend I have now discriminates against my child. He said he did not want her in his house until I gave birth to another child for him. I thought that it would be a risk to have two children now because I could not afford to sponsor the one I have. He always forces me for sexual intercourse. I remember the last time he flogged me seriously. Five months ago we [had that] conflict. I have left him now. I am ashamed of telling the story even to my parents."*
>
> *Young mother, Sierra Leone*

Regional differences were also seen, with a third in West Africa reporting their male partners to be unsupportive of their children and over three-quarters in Uganda reporting that their male partners were unsupportive of their children. In Uganda, alcohol use by male partners was frequently reported as a problem. The problems of alcohol use and abandonment were also evident in the dramas that Ugandan young mothers performed to describe their situations. Young mothers in all three countries reported being ashamed to speak out about domestic violence. In Uganda and Liberia, when problems with their male partners were reported, they were usually reported to the police. In contrast, in Sierra Leone young mothers appeared to prefer to use community leaders and the local chief to help mediate with their partners because they did not trust the police to handle domestic disputes. Also in Sierra Leone, young mothers reported that they would not have felt able to use these community resources before the PAR. However, through their work in the project, they developed trust with the community elders and felt that these elders would listen to and respect their descriptions of their situations.

Young mothers reported that increased economic security from their livelihood initiatives and support from their peers in the group facilitated their leaving abusive partnerships. Even when participants did not choose to leave their abusive partners, several reported that they gained comfort from the advice of their peers in the group. In addition, in Uganda, there were several examples throughout the duration of the project of participants forming new relationships and getting married. Community members and young mothers saw these new relationships as evidence that the participants were taking on more socially accepted roles in their community.

A key learning about gender relations occurred as agency staff included consultation and advocacy with husbands and boyfriends as well as other family members as part of their work with young mothers. This facilitated many young mothers to participate more fully in the project and reduced conflict at home. Importantly, site facilitators sometimes visited family homes to mediate conflicts. Since most facilitators were residents of the communities in which they worked or were known by the community, direct intervention with partners and family members often resulted in de-escalating conflict. Some groups invited family members to attend their group meetings if a girl faced a particular problem. Another strategy was for members of the peer group to do home visits together with her husband or boyfriend.

"When the program started, we were the first to enroll. My husband wanted me to join…. After a year, my husband suddenly changed his mind… my friends went to talk to him…. He became sick and I spent my business money to take care of his sickness. When he recovered, he realized he was doing the wrong thing. Today I am happy being a member of the PAR."

Young mother, Sierra Leone

Those participants who reported that they had an unsupportive male partner were significantly more likely to report that they were unable to prevent pregnancy when they did not want to become pregnant. One likely explanation is that young mothers in unsupportive relationships are less able to negotiate safer sex practices. Another possibility is that young mothers with unsupportive male partners may be more likely to have sexual relations with men apart from their children's father.

A key lesson learned is that gender relations must receive attention as they have the potential to undermine positive gains the young mothers might realize. Therefore strategies need to be developed from the onset to involve boyfriends and husbands. Also, community-based approaches to addressing problems of domestic abuse and violence need to be developed as part of community-based projects.

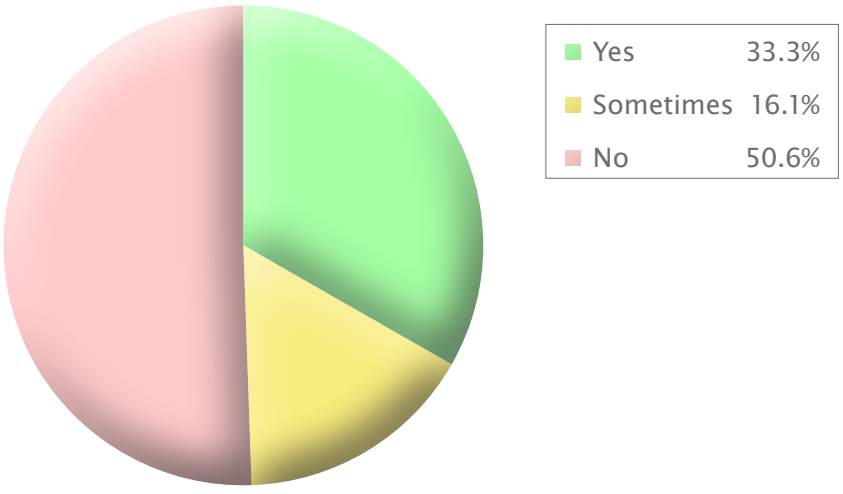
"The men are also benefiting and appreciating. As when we sold ground nuts, that helped brothers, fathers, husbands in sorting out domestic issues like hospital fees or things like that. So [the men] are helped by the girls."

Young mother, Uganda

"One young mother said many young men [boyfriends] were not happy at first with young mothers going to meetings. 'But now since we earn money and share it, boys are happy for us to participate.' Another young mother said 'my husband used to beat me but now he has changed. I get money and do everything myself, so he changed.' One young mother said that as poverty worsened, her boyfriend took money from her cashbox but she took him to the police to get it back. The same woman said, 'Because of bad business [fluctuating international exchange rates], he beats me and I go to the police and put him in jail. After a couple of days, he signs a paper saying he will not beat me, but he still beats me.'"

Academic ethnography notes, Liberia

"My boyfriend/husband is supportive of my children."



Young mothers develop tools to address sexual exploitation and violence, often with the support of group members. However, shame is still a barrier to seeking help.

Sexual exploitation and violence is endemic across all three countries. During the course of the project, young mothers reported that they or their children experienced sexual violence, including rape. In these instances, young mothers relied on support from their group to help them access justice, often going as a group to a community advisory committee member before seeking official help. In Sierra Leone, one case was referred to the police for prosecution, while the local chief handled another case. In Uganda and Liberia, some cases were reported to the police. However, it is likely that most cases of sexual violence remained wrapped in secrecy because of a pervasive culture of silence and imperviousness about doing anything to change cultural attitudes towards sexual violence. Several participants did mention finding the group a source of support in coping with these instances of sexual violence. As with domestic violence, developing constructive steps towards attaining women's human rights and gender justice are formidable challenges.

> *"My husband beat me and threw me out of our home. I went to stay with my parents.... I was there for three months. My husband went to my parents and apologized. During this period I became pregnant and we went back to [our community]. When I returned… my husband abandoned me for another girl…. I am happy with the PAR project. Each time we meet, I have the opportunity to share my problems with other young mothers. They advise me to be patient and to be sure that after giving birth to this baby, I should join family planning."*
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> *Young mother, Sierra Leone*

In one Sierra Leonean community, young mothers said that they would not take cases to the police because "we do not have strong human rights places and the police station are not taking proper care about rape cases." Other Sierra Leonean participants described how they had previously taken cases of rape to the police and that the police had not handled the matter adequately. The young mothers in communities where there were reports of cases that had not been handled appropriately in the past were more likely to report in the survey that they would report to family, the chief, or an NGO if they were forced to have sex with someone.

In the survey, 86.8 percent of participants said that they knew how to report and get help if someone tried to go to bed with them by force. Across the three countries, most young mothers said that they would report to the police, while a smaller number would report such cases to their parents or trusted community members. A handful of participants in each country described reporting incidents of sexual violence in the past, mostly to police. However, a small number of participants in Sierra Leone said that while they had experienced sexual violence, they had not reported prior these incidents because they had been too ashamed.

Participation in sex work decreases as young mothers gain confidence and self respect and develop alternative livelihood strategies.

Prior to the project, young mothers in almost all of the field sites reported engaging in transactional sex or having boyfriends to gain economic support. Throughout the project, young mothers were proud that they were no longer engaged in such work. Community members often observed that participants were doing far less sex work. In all countries, community members valued this effect and that participants were engaged productively in the community.

In our survey, we asked participants not whether they engaged in sex work but whether other girls they know of in the project engaged in sex work. Notably, 83.1 percent of participants said that girls in the project *did not* engage in transactional sex, while 7.4 percent reported that they sometimes engaged in transactional sex and 9.4 percent said "yes," girls engaged in transactional sex. In the descriptive responses of those who reported sometimes or yes, nearly all young mothers reported that PAR participants engaged in sex work less than they did before the PAR project began. This illustrates that while transactional sex decreased as livelihood opportunities improved, transactional sex continues to be a source of livelihood support for some girls.

Although much remains to be learned about strategies to reduce sexual exploitation, a key learning from the project is that when girls have sustainable livelihoods, sex work is much less likely to be used as a survival strategy.

"PAR girls no longer go to the beach [do prostitution], girls are still meeting, they are taking care of their children, and the PAR had been beneficial to the community and has had a 'spill-over' effect on non-PAR girls."

Community member, Liberia

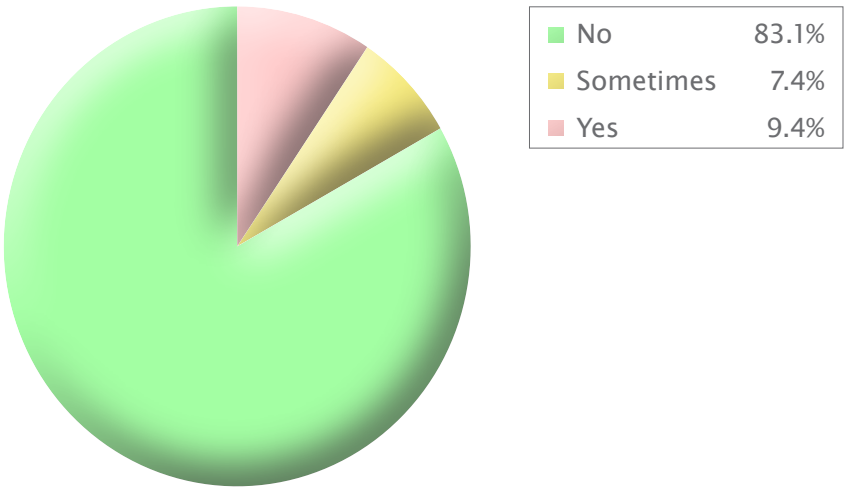
"Families no longer send girls with old men for sex."

Community leader, Uganda

"I have stopped going out with boys. I have changed and they have accepted me. And the business I do… I am able to support my family."

Young mother, Sierra Leone

Many girls in Sierra Leone/Liberia/Uganda have sex partners to earn money. Is this true of the girls in the PAR project?



Challenges to Using Highly Participatory Processes

The success of this project was dependent on the capacity and engagement of field level staff using a deeper, slower facilitation process and our donors valuing *processes* that improved the lives of young mothers instead of emphasizing pre-established outputs. Another key factor was that the project had commitment and institutional support from the agencies involved. Our partner agencies had an established record of working on the social reintegration of children formerly associated with fighting forces, including many girls. Also, the PAR was often introduced within existing project supports and in contexts where the agencies were already known. Additionally, many agency partners were already engaged in participatory work when they joined the project.

The level of participation in the project, however, was much greater than what NGOs typically achieve and what donors are familiar with and expect. Even experienced NGO staff found it fundamentally more challenging than anticipated to fully master the skills and approaches necessary to support the highest levels of participation. Many agency partners had to change from using a predominantly directive style to one that emphasized listening, dialogue, nondirective advising, and strong facilitation skills. As they internalized participatory principles, frontline staff reported that they did so by checking their practice against the mantra "*If it doesn't come from the girls, it's not PAR.*" Although, most of the team members have now mastered these skills, they anticipate continued challenges in effectively communicating and teaching these skills to their peers in the context of ongoing agency work. Engaging in PAR means a commitment to staff development, supervision, modeling of participatory processes, and continued dialogue about the research being undertaken with agency partners, field staff, and young mother participants. Therefore substantial time was spent in capacity building at multiple levels.

In the first year or more of the project, integrating participatory processes initially proved difficult — not so much at community levels where participation tends to be quickly understood — but at agency and donor levels. Highly-participatory processes did not originate at agency headquarters but were field driven and decentralized. Consequently, PAR partner agencies with substantial hierarchy experienced greater challenges in implementation than smaller agencies because personnel at many levels required education about how PAR works. Also, in some partner agencies, directors or high-ranking national staff showed low levels of engagement with the project, possibly because of the relatively small money involved and the large size of some of our partner organizations. The marginalization of the PAR project within broader

organizational programming priorities suggests that it is a big challenge for slow but highly participatory projects to be "on the screen" of large agencies that are accustomed to working in a different modality.

PAR has a comparatively low financial input and works best on a small scale. The benefits of a "small is beautiful"[35] approach in facilitating participation became apparent over the life of our PAR as groups of about 30 girls came to know each other well, met regularly as a group, worked as a team, and initiated social actions on their own and their community's behalf. From the viewpoint of agencies, however, small money is less desirable — even if it "works" — than are projects with large funds which support agency visibility and viability. As observed by Jennings, "The index of care for a people in crisis is measured in how many millions they receive in aid."[36]

Repeatedly, some partners observed that from their agency's perspective, this was a "small project" and that factors other than effective community-based programs were driving how agencies define their priorities. Also, from the agency perspective, "participatory programs often cost more up front, and their results seem too small and may appear too miserly with resources as intervention programs shore up existing capacities."[37] This proved true in our PAR where the upfront cost of our PAR was not so much financial as it was the lengthy time (for some agencies, a year or longer) spent in capacity building of personnel and in mobilizing the girls — with no early plans to distribute funds for social action initiatives.

A major barrier to implementing highly-participatory processes is that donors and agencies usually want to respond quickly to humanitarian needs on a broad scale. The fact that humanitarian agencies and donors tend to value large financial inputs and going to scale rapidly, making it prestigious to receive large grants and implement projects on a large scale, while a "small is beautiful" approach garners less prestige and attention. We believe that it may be possible to find ways to combine slower, highly participatory approaches with meeting needs on a large scale. However, significant attitudinal, practical, and institutional barriers will need to be addressed before this will become possible.

Institutional pressures also limit the use of highly participatory approaches. Donors and supervisors within and outside organizations normatively mandate that specific outcomes are identified in advance of program initiation. This prescriptive specificity makes it difficult to achieve highly participatory

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[35] Jennings (2000), p. 5

[36] Jennings (2000), p. 3

[37] Jennings (2000), p. 4

processes (or even lesser levels of participation) as a primary goal of community-based work. Agency partners reported that their programs are so highly-donor driven that when there is no clear indication from donors that they want participatory methods, there is lack of incentive in the agencies to alter their approaches despite purported values of participation; in fact, a danger exists that programming will lose funding if they do.

In this project, our funders learned about participatory processes through their attendance at our annual meetings and the ensuing dialogue with academic and agency partners and young mothers themselves. They came to understand how PAR processes work and thereafter de-emphasized pre-defined outputs. Understandably, our funders appreciated the positive impacts that participatory processes evoked in this project and wanted more participants brought under the participatory umbrella. Funders also have obligations to answer to their own Boards or governments about how money is spent and whether the investment creates sustainable and impactful outcomes.

Fundamental challenges of a highly participatory approach have to do with the length of time needed to enable full participation, the flexibility required, and the initial openness needed about outcomes. Although all partner agencies were impressed by the low costs and sustainability of the outcomes of participatory methodology, the contrast between the timeframe of the PAR processes and other NGO activities make it difficult to adopt highly participatory processes into other ongoing work. Also, a key difference between the PAR methodology and other projects had to do with the way that funds for young mothers' social action were managed. Agencies are used to writing proposals and budgets with each line item specified. Donors are used to requiring agencies to specify in advance exactly how they plan to use each dollar requested. The PAR project began with money set aside for each agency with open and unspecified budget lines allocated for young mothers' social action; later the young mothers decided, with counsel from site facilitators and community advisors, how to spend the money on social action. Thus a measure of flexibility and faith was required that funds would be used wisely.

PAR is a long, slow decentralized process that requires substantial attention to its ongoing development in the field. Close mentoring by a caring facilitator, cultivation of young mothers' agency, and development of relationships between young mothers, community-members, and agency focal people were critical components. Centrally, young mothers — both formerly associated and other vulnerable young mothers in the community — became researchers of their own situations and subsequently were able to garner their own resources to move them from being marginalized young mothers to contributing and respected members of their communities.

"Senior management didn't understand PAR at times."

Agency partner

"The process of change has not just been for the girls but also has been in the way we do our work which is quite profound for me."

Agency partner

"This project is unique. Usually in our work, like family programs, all the activities come from Out, they come from the Top."

Agency partner

Recommendations for Practice & Policy

The results of this project resonate well with the Paris Principles and underscore the importance of taking a participatory, inclusive approach to the integration of young mothers in conflict-affected settings. Although the implications for practice and policy are interconnected, they are presented separately below for purposes of readability.

Recommendations for Practitioners

1. **Enable meaningful participation, building reintegration supports around young mothers' own understandings and agency.** In contrast to the limited child participation that is visible in many reintegration efforts, this project demonstrates that meaningful participation is not only possible but essential. Because young mothers' situation is unique, it is crucial to learn from them what reintegration consists of and to avoid the imposition of adult-centric approaches. The fact that communities saw the young mothers rebuilding their lives and developing positive roles as mothers and community members aided their reintegration. A highly participatory approach brings out the young mothers' leadership abilities and helps to make them effective agents of their own protection and well being.
2. **Facilitate group support among the girls.** In contrast to the individual benefits and focus of many DDR efforts, this project included internal group support among the young mothers. This process was essential in building positive relations between former CAAFAG and other vulnerable young mothers in the community who had not been recruited, thereby paving the way for the social acceptance of the former. Group discussion provided non-formal psychosocial support by helping the vulnerable young mothers realize they are not alone and by stimulating empathy and care by trusted peers. Through group discussion, the participants explored their challenges in a trusting social space and considered collectively how best to address their problems.
3. **Encourage effective mentoring and advocacy by respected community members.** Influential community mentors support reintegration by providing positive role models, advising on their business and other activities, coaching in regard to appropriate behavior, and advocating on the young mothers' behalf with the wider community. Importantly, mentors can help to mediate the disputes that often arise between former CAAFAG and members of family and community.

4. **Take a longer, slower approach to integration that builds a sense of ownership by the communities and the young mothers.** In emergencies and post-conflict settings, child protection actors typically focus on organizing rapid supports on a large scale, and programs frequently run for one or two years. Although this approach provides much valuable support, it is not well suited to building the sense of ownership that is essential for sustained integration. As evidenced in this project, participation develops over a longer period of time, and a slower approach enables both the development of the young mothers' agency and the internal change of community attitudes and patterns of acceptance.
5. **Build staff capacities for taking a more flexible, facilitative, young mother-centered approach.** To take a more flexible approach that avoids a "one size fits all" orientation and builds on young mothers' understanding and agency, reintegration workers need to have not only strong technical skills of child protection but also excellent skills of facilitation. In addition, they need to see their role as facilitative and oriented toward mutual learning rather than directive. Since this project indicated that advanced facilitation skills were often not in the repertoire of otherwise skilled child protection workers, humanitarian agencies should give careful attention to preparing workers to use more facilitative approaches and supporting effective facilitation at field level.

Recommendations for Donors & Policy Makers

1. **Programming for the integration of CAAFAG should include specific attention to young women and their children without targeting them excessively.** Despite the occurrence of extensive reintegration work in all three countries, young mothers and their children remain underserved and at significant risk of sexual exploitation and other protection threats. Young mothers face challenges that relate to their gendered experiences inside armed forces and groups and that have not been addressed adequately by existing reintegration efforts. Effective supports for young mothers should be highly participatory and should build on their resilience and agency. However, supports should not be exclusively or mostly for former CAAFAG, since excessive targeting of former CAAFAG can cause stigma and jealousy. Supports for former CAAFAG should be intermixed with supports for other vulnerable girls, youth, and children.
2. **Economic reintegration is key for the successful integration of young mothers, including former CAAFAG.** Whether CAAFAG or not, young mothers identified having a livelihood and sustainable income as one

of their highest priorities. The organization of livelihood supports has impact far beyond the provision of income, as it boosts social status, enables family and community acceptance, heightens access to education, and reduced sexual exploitation. Through appropriate economic supports, young mothers are able to fulfill their roles as mothers, gain social acceptance, and find meaning and hope in civilian life.

3. **Provide long-term, flexible, inclusive funding for the integration of formerly recruited young mothers.** Key reintegration processes such as enabling young mothers to be highly participatory, gaining community acceptance, and earning a sustainable livelihood take significant amounts of time and cannot be accomplished in the year-long tranches of funding that are typically used to support reintegration efforts. To enable meaningful participation and ownership of the reintegration process by young mothers and their communities, it is essential to take a multi-year approach and to allow for a flexible programming approach that is guided by the young mothers and adapts to fluid circumstances. It is vital to avoid tying funding to preconceived outcomes and program approaches. Equally important is to mix support for former CAAFAG with supports for other vulnerable children and youth, thereby avoiding further stigmatization by excessive targeting.

4. **Support young mothers' and women's rights as part of post-conflict transformation for development and peace.** The documented hardships of young mothers arise not only from the scourges of war but also from structural and direct violence and discrimination. Program efforts to improve the situation of young mothers and their children will have limited long-term impact unless they are coupled with robust efforts to support the rights of girls and women, who are key development actors. These efforts should include advocacy and programming and avoid a top-down approach in favor of one that promotes dialogue and enables social change through the mobilization of internal actors.

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Appendix I

Findings & Recommendations

Findings

- The meaning of social (re)integration for young mothers is that they and their children are accepted, respected, and included as contributing family and community members.
- To facilitate social reintegration that is community based and highly participatory, communities should be involved from the outset and should take ownership of the process.
- Peer groups for young mothers are instrumental in providing psychosocial support for positive coping and social reintegration.
- Young mothers' peer groups are fostered by organizing, structuring, and expert facilitation by agency staff, whose ongoing aim is to shift decision making to the young mothers.
- Young mothers' group work facilitates their reintegration through increasing their strength and improving their capacity to be seen and heard in communities.
- Economic livelihood supports are instrumental in improving young mothers' family and community status and relationships. Sustainability is strongly related to flexibility and diversification in income generating activities.
- Family relationships are significantly improved through young mothers' participation in the PAR project.
- Young mothers show improved physical & psychological well being.
- Unwanted pregnancies remain a challenging issue for many young mothers.
- Children of young mothers show improved well being, which facilitates their social reintegration.
- Gender relations are complex. While some young mothers report supportive relationships, the majority say they do not experience their boyfriends/husbands as supportive of them or their children.
- Young mothers develop tools to address sexual exploitation and violence, often with the support of group members. However, shame is still a barrier to seeking help.
- Participation in sex work decreases as young mothers gain confidence and self respect and develop alternative livelihood strategies.

Recommendations for Practitioners

1. Enable meaningful participation, building reintegration supports around young mothers' own understandings and agency.
2. Facilitate group support among the girls.
3. Encourage effective mentoring and advocacy by respected community members.
4. Take a longer, slower approach to integration that builds a sense of ownership by the communities and the young mothers.
5. Build staff capacities for taking a more flexible, facilitative, young mother-centered approach.

Recommendations for Donors & Policy Makers

1. Programming for the integration of CAAFAG should include specific attention to young women and their children without targeting them excessively.
2. Economic reintegration is key for the successful integration of young mothers, including former CAAFAG.
3. Provide long-term, flexible, inclusive funding for the integration of formerly recruited young mothers.
4. Support young mothers' and women's rights as part of post-conflict transformation for development and peace.

Appendix II

Dissemination Principles

Guiding Principles for Research, Presentations, Writing, and Dissemination: "It is good to share what we are doing"

1. Be ethical towards each other as organizers and country partners in consulting about complementary projects, seeking feedback about writing, and acknowledging individual and group contributions through open exchange of information about spin-off projects.
2. "Do No Harm" according to the principles we, as a project team, have developed.
3. Hold young mothers' decision making within the PAR primary to what happens *at all steps* of participation in the project.
4. Maintain the integrity of the PAR by not prioritizing secondary work that may interfere.
5. Bring research ideas for work complementary to the PAR to the organizing team for discussion and, if there is agreement on its appropriateness, then discuss the research plan with the involved country team and, if appropriate, with girls and community members if the project is planned to take place at a PAR site.
6. Ensure for any work done with the PAR population, whether the participants, their children, or members of the community, that only issues raised by the young mothers are researched at PAR sites and the research is conducted in partnership with them using the same model as the PAR work done in that community.
7. Facilitate and support complementary research prompted by our learning from the PAR at agency-affiliated sites that are *not* part of the PAR and share the research results with PAR teams and participants. Such research initiatives should be communicated to the organizing team and to the country team members for information-sharing purposes early in the proposed research process.
8. Design and conduct research in PAR or non-PAR agency-affiliated sites with a commitment to action and lasting change, by garnering sufficient resources and giving supports and sharing learning with agencies and young mothers at the PAR sites.

9. Share manuscript ideas in advance with the coordinating team, and call for collaboration [when desired] for papers about the PAR. In sharing ideas, respect will be given to the initiating author's plans for manuscript development.
10. Be inclusive in crediting authorship and in acknowledging those who have done the primary work. In general, we support two broad principles: (1) shared ownership of academic and other products from the overall project and (2) inclusive authorship or recognition of team members' contributions. The main author will be listed first with others listed according to their contributions to the paper. If there are one or two main contributors they are listed first according to the order they decide, and the others are listed in alphabetical order. We each also have the right to request that our name not be on a paper as an author.
11. Acknowledgement will be given to partner agencies/communities (as appropriate) either in the body of the text or in a footnote.
12. Inform our partners through periodic e-letters of our plans for academic outputs and ask partners to contact us if they wish to be involved in some way — such as reviewing the manuscript. We will appropriately acknowledge specific contributions.
13. Recognize that for some papers, such as personal reflections or in a specific area of academic expertise, that shared authorship may not be appropriate although, in all cases, the project itself should be acknowledged — such as in a footnote. In no instance is it ethical for individually-authored papers/works to "scoop" the reporting of larger PAR findings about reintegration of young mothers in war-affected countries.
14. Inform each other when we choose to begin writing a piece independently to aid transparency and avoid unnecessary duplications and feelings of not being open. This applies only to PAR-related or complementary projects and not to projects in which we are involved that are outside the scope of the PAR.
15. Before submitting a manuscript for publication that is PAR-related research or research conducted in PAR communities, whether it has been solo or group authored, we will share with each other what we have written for purposes of peer feedback and discussion.
16. Use of raw data from the young mothers (for example, poems, videos, dramas) by project stakeholders can occur only in consultation with the girls and/or representatives of the girls and with their agreement and consent. This entails each country team informing them about the purpose of using the data and the audience, developing and using

procedures for running key points by representatives of the girls [and, when possible, paper drafts], and giving them the opportunity to comment and agree or disagree on how their experiences are represented. Country teams will work with girl mother participants to develop decision-making processes about dissemination of raw data from young mothers for publication and presentations.

17. The young mothers in the PAR project are free to disseminate on their own their experiences, products and learning. For example, they might decide to tell stories on radio interviews, conduct interviews, contribute to the PAR website, or allow themselves to be filmed in regard to their work on the PAR project. For principles of "Do no harm," representatives of the girls from the field sites should be advised that decisions about what they plan should be shared and decisions on participation should be made in consultation with the Project Coordinators and/or Country Teams.

Development of a commonly agreed, ethical dissemination strategy for all PAR project stakeholders

Goal: To help improve the lives of young mothers and their children by bringing forward in an appropriate manner their voices, perspectives, and PAR-related experiences, products, lessons, and advocacy points to diverse groups and audiences.

Strategy: Effective information dissemination is a key part of the "action" part of PAR. We will follow a multi-level strategy of reaching key actors and influential people at levels such as the District or Province level, the national level, the regional level, and the international level. The specific targets and strategies are as outlined in the various proposals we have written and include academicians, child protection workers, policy leaders, donors, and the general public. Girls are key advocates for themselves and those they represent in their own communities or regions. They will be facilitated in this role to the extent they wish and is possible and appropriate.

Ethics: Following the Guiding Principles outlined at our initial Bellagio meeting and above, we will respect principles such as:

1. Confidentiality: We will not share publicly any information that the participants themselves regard as sensitive, inappropriate for sharing, humiliating, or likely to cause harm. This means that any participant can choose not to have disseminated a story she has told, a song that was developed about her experiences, etc. The project coordinators and country team representatives may decide to keep confidential information

that the girls are willing to share. But nothing that the girls want to be kept confidential should be shared unless specific permission is obtained.

2. Informed Consent as outlined in the University of Wyoming IRB form and the consent form signed by PAR girl mother participants.
3. Collaborative development of advocacy and educational messages: Girls themselves should have effective channels for making inputs into the development of key messages to be used in advocacy and education of audiences such as practitioners, donors, policy leaders, and the general public.
4. Shared ownership and dissemination rights: The participants in the PAR project are free to disseminate on their own their experiences, products, and learning. For example, they might decide to tell stories on radio interviews, conduct interviews with journalists, or allow themselves to be filmed in regard to their work on the PAR project. However, decisions about what should be shared and with whom should be made in consultation with the Project Coordinators and/or the Country Teams.

Appendix III
Consent Form

Verbal Consent Form for Community Based Participatory Action Research Study of Girl Mothers

(To be translated from English into the indigenous language and then back translated into English to assure accuracy of translation)

Title

Girl Mothers in Fighting Forces and their Children in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone/Liberia: Programming and Action Research to Improve their Situations

Project Organizers

Susan McKay, Angela Veale, Michael Wessells, and Miranda Worthen

Local NGO Project Facilitator(s): _____

The following is to be read in the language of the participant. If the individual agrees to be part of this participatory action research project, you must sign on the line marked 'Witness to Consent Procedures', at the end of this form. If the individual is a minor according to local law, a parent or guardian must also sign at the end of the form. Also mark the date on the appropriate line.

Purpose of the Study

We are asking you to be part of a research study. We want to learn from you and other girls about girls mothers' needs and situations. We are working with girl mothers and community members in Uganda, Sierra Leone and Liberia. We want girls to be central to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of this project and to help us understand the information that is gathered. This research is being conducted by (name of NGO) with the help of researchers in the United States and Ireland.

Procedures

To learn this information we are talking with girls in the community, their parents and guardians, and many community members. With the help of [NGO] and women in this community (names), you have been identified as a girl who might be willing to participate in this project. If you agree to help us, we ask that you actively work with us to plan and implement the research and evaluate what we learn about girl mothers and their children. This project will involve you in spending time with other girls in the community and also community members as well as with the NGO researchers.

Risks and Discomforts

We will be asking you to work with us on this project. The project will begin in January and continue until July 2007 and then we will decide whether to continue for a longer time. If you agree to be part of this project, this should be voluntary on your part. The project should involve minimal risk for you. If you experience distress because of your participation, women community members will talk with you and support you. You also can talk with [NGO] who will help you. You may choose not to participate in this project or stop your participation at any time. If you no longer want to participate, you should talk with [NGO], and you may stop immediately.

Benefits

This information will help [name of facilitating NGO] and other organizations in countries affected by war to provide improved programs for girl mothers and their children. There may be no direct benefit to you personally. You will not be provided with material goods or compensation for your participation. You may benefit from some of the training you receive such as in leading group discussions and other activities that are part of the project.

Confidentiality

Information gathered during this project will be used for our study. Some of the information will be written down or recorded on an audiotape or videotape so that we have a record of what was said. This information will not be used to identify you or others who participate in this project. Any personal information such as your name, names of your parents or guardians, and the name of your community will be stored separately from the information that is written down or taped and will be locked in the office of [NGO]. Only you and the people who are working on the project will have the key to this information and will be able to read it. Every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of this information as far as is legally possible.

Voluntariness

It is your decision whether or not to be in this study. You can stop being in this study at any time. This will not affect any assistance you receive from [NGO] or any other organization.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions you can ask [name of NGO facilitator] who is in charge of the study for this community. He/she can be contacted through the [NGO office location, telephone _____]. You can also contact Angela Veale or Mike Wessells [include their contact information depending upon whether the consent form is to be used in Uganda or Sierra Leone/Liberia]. You can also contact Susan McKay at the University of Wyoming in the United States [include contact details here].

Do you agree to participate in this study? _____ [Verbal consent]

_____ (Participant signs with an"X")

_____ (Name and contact information of girl)

_____ (Name and contact information of parent/guardian if the participant is a minor according to local law)

Witness to Consent (to be signed by a literate witness after subject has verbally consented).

_____ _____

Signature Contact Information

Date _____

Appendix IV

Survey Methods & Instrument

Survey Methods

The PAR survey was developed in partnership with the young mothers, agency staff, and academics. In the second and third year of the PAR, participants compiled lists of important indicators of successful reintegration. These lists were constructed during data analysis workshops often led by the in-country academic partners, and in young mothers' groups at the field sites. Academic and agency partners also used information from the young mothers to generate additional key indicators of social reintegration. These indicators were compiled and then ranked by how frequently the indicator came up in the lists developed by the young mothers and academic and agency partners.

In total, forty-seven items representing 20 categories were cataloged, staying as close to participants' own words as possible. These items were then presented to participants to test for face validity and rank importance. This process was conducted in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda to assure that the indicators selected were coherent across countries and to make adjustments in wording according to cultural understandings. Based on the ranking of the indicators and questions within each category, a pilot survey was developed comprising of 19 indicators with space to give narrative information in addition to answer each question on a three-point scale (yes, sometimes, no). This pilot was tested in at least two field sites in each country.

Using the results from the pilot, a final survey was created with twenty questions and at least one specific qualitative "probe" per question. The survey process was facilitated by country-based academics. Close contact with organizers and a narrative survey guide ensured that the survey process was similar in each country. Surveyors visited each field site and surveyed each participant in private in her home community. Data were entered locally and sent to Worthen to clean and analyze using epidemiologic methods.

Survey Instrument

Participant Code: _____

Interviewer Name: _____

Language Survey Conducted In: _____

Date of Survey: _____

Research Site _____

Question 1.

Birthdate or Age

Question 2.

Are you originally from this community?

Yes ____ No _____

(Add brief explanation if necessary)

Question 3.

(Preface this question by assuring participant that she should answer truthfully and any future benefits will flow equally to all participants, regardless of status)

Were you involved with an armed group or fighting force?

Yes ____ No ____

If Yes: What were your jobs with the group? How long were you in the group?

If No: Where did you live during the war?

Question 4.

Who are you living with now? (check all that apply)

___ parents/mother/father
___ aunt/uncle
___ brother/sister
___ boyfriend
___ husband
___ friends
___ on my own
___ other _____

Question 5.

I feel involved with what the group is doing.

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

Please give an example or explain why.

Question 6.

Involvement in the project has made me and my children more liked or loved by my family.

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

Please explain why you chose the answer you gave?

Question 7.

My boyfriend/husband is supportive of my children.

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

How is he supportive or unsupportive?

Question 8.

Community members think worse of me now than before I joined the project.

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

Are there some people in the community who think better and some worse?

Who thinks worse of you? Why do you think that is?

Who thinks better? Why do you think that is?

Question 9.

Through participating in the group, I can now speak in public more easily.

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

When do you speak in public? What are you able to speak about?

Question 10.

I am able to be supportive to my family by buying basic necessities.

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

How is your support different than before the project began?

Question 11.

Through the group, I help other people in the community.

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

If yes or sometimes: How have you been able to help?

If no: Why not?

Question 12.

I can take better care of my child than I could before I joined the group.

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

What were you thinking of when you chose the answer you gave?

Question 13.

Many girls in Sierra Leone/Liberia/Uganda have sex partners to earn money. Is this true of the girls in the PAR project?

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

Do you think that this happens more or less than it did before the project began?

Question 14.

I feel more supported and respected by community members now than I did before the project.

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

If Yes: Why do you think they respect you more?

What do you think changed?

If you do not feel more supported or respected, why do you think that is?

Question 15.

Has your health changed since you joined the project?

Better ____ Same ____ Worse ____

Please explain?

Question 16.

How has the health of your child or children changed since you joined the project?

Better ____ Same ____ Worse ____

Please explain?

Question 17.

I get pregnant even when I don't want to.

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

Have you had a baby in the last three years? One Two Three

If yes, Why is it hard to avoid getting pregnant?

If no, How have you learned to prevent pregnancy?

Question 18.

If someone wants to go to bed with me by force, I know how to report it and get help.

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

What would you do?

Have you ever reported if somebody has forced you in this way? If yes, to whom and what happened?

What makes it hard for you to report it or get help?

Question 19.

I have learned new skills from the PAR project.

Yes ____ Sometimes ____ No ____

Like what?

Question 20.

Is there anything else important you want to say?

What?

Comparative survey results

Report from the Survey

Question 1.

Birthdate or Age

- The average age of participants at the beginning of the PAR was 21. The average age for participants in Uganda, Liberia and Sierra Leone at the start of the PAR was 18, 20, and 22, respectively.

Question 2.

Are you originally from this community?

- 35% of Liberians report not being originally from this community.
- 44% of Sierra Leoneans report not being originally from this community.
- 21% of Ugandans report not being originally from this community.
- Only in Sierra Leone was there a significant difference between those who were and were not formerly associated, with 41% of formerly associated young mothers being from other communities and 71% of not associated young mothers being from other communities. This is largely influenced by the disproportionately large number of not formerly associated young mothers in the urban centers, where all participants were more likely to be from other communities.

Question 3.

Were you involved with an armed group or fighting force?

- 33% of the total PAR participants were not associated with fighting forces.
- 66% of the total PAR participants were associated with fighting forces.
- There were large differences in percentage formerly associated by country and community:
- 80% of Liberians were formerly associated.
- 88% of Sierra Leoneans were formerly associated.
- 34% of Ugandans were formerly associated.

Question 5.

I feel involved with what the group is doing.

- 90.7% reported that they felt involved in what the group was doing. An additional 4% reported sometimes feeling involved. Only 5% reported not feeling involved in what the group was doing. There were no statistically significant differences by country.

Question 6.

Involvement in the project has made me and my children more liked or loved by my family.

- In total, 86.5% of participants reported that involvement in the project has made me and my children more liked or loved by my family. An additional 2.6% reported sometimes, while 10.8% answered no.
- There were statistically significant differences by country, with 93% of Liberians reporting increase in family love, 89% of Sierra Leoneans reporting increase in family love, and 80% of Ugandans reported increase in family love.
- There was no significant difference among those associated and not associated in Sierra Leone or Uganda, but there was a significant difference in Liberia, with those who were associated being slightly more likely to report greater family love than those not associated.

Question 7.

My boyfriend/husband is supportive of my children.

- Among all participants, 33.3% reported that their boyfriends or husbands were supportive; 16.1% said he was sometimes supportive; and 50.6% said he was not supportive.
- There were significant differences by country, however, with Ugandans being much more likely to report unsupportive boyfriends/husbands than Liberians or Sierra Leoneans. 77% of Ugandans reported that their boyfriends/husbands were not supportive. In contrast, 33% of Liberians and 35% of Sierra Leoneans reported that their boyfriends/husbands were not supportive. There were no differences in each country by whether or not a participant was associated.

Question 8.

Community members think worse of me now than before I joined the project.

- Among all participants, 73% said no, that community members do not think worse of me than before joining the project; 15% said sometimes, while 12% said that community members do think worse of me.
- There is a significant difference by country, with Ugandans reporting being thought of worse by community members more than Sierra Leoneans or Liberians. Qualitatively, most of these were reports of jealousy experienced from specific individuals, including family members or neighbors. 30% of Ugandans reported yes, that community members do think worse and 49% said no. In contrast, only 2% of Liberians and 1% of Sierra Leoneans reported that community members thought worse of them after joining the project.
- There was no statistical difference among those who were and weren't formerly associated in any country.

Question 9.

Through participating in the group, I can now speak in public more easily.

- In total, 81.3% of participants reported "yes, I can now speak in public more easily;" 8.7% sometimes; and 10.1% no.
- While there is a significant difference by country, it is not a large difference, ranging from 77% reporting yes in Liberia to 85% reporting yes in Uganda.
- In Liberia, there is a statistically significant difference among those associated and not, with those formerly associated reporting about twice the ability to speak (85%) as those not formerly associated (42%).

Question 10.

I am able to be supportive to my family by buying basic necessities.

- In total, 73.3% of participants reported "yes, I am able to be supportive to my family by buying basic necessities;" 16.5% sometimes; 10.2% no.
- There were no differences by country, with reports ranging from 70% yes in Sierra Leone to 76% yes in Uganda. In every country, those who were formerly associated report that they are able to be supportive to their family by buying basic necessities more than those who were not formerly associated. However, this difference is only statistically significant in Uganda, not in Liberia or Sierra Leone.

Question 11.

Through the group, I help other people in the community.

- In total, 58.2% of participants reported "yes, I help other people in the community;" 25.8% sometimes; 15.9% no.
- There are no significant differences by association, but there are significant differences between countries. 75% of Liberians report being helpful, 54% of Sierra Leoneans, and 56% of Ugandans.

Question 12.

I can take better care of my child than I could before I joined the group.

- In total, 83.8% of participants reported "yes, I can take better care of my child than I could before I joined the group;" 7.1% sometimes; 9.0% no.
- There were no significant differences by country. The only country where the was a significant difference among those formerly associated or not was in Uganda, where 18% of not formerly associated and 4% of those who were formerly associated reported that they were not better able to take care of their children. 77% of not formerly associated and 91% of formerly associated said they were able to better care for their children.

Question 13.

Many girls in Sierra Leone/Liberia/Uganda have sex partners to earn money. Is this true of the girls in the PAR project?

- In total, 9.4% of participants reported "yes, girls in the PAR have sex partners to earn money;" 7.4% sometimes; 83.1% no.
- Within each country, there are sites where 100% of participants report that no girls in the PAR engage in sex work. However, the range of frequency of participants saying that others do or do not participate in sex work varies by country. Participation in sex work did not follow a rural/urban classification. In the most urban site in Sierra Leone 79% of participants claimed that young mothers in the PAR participated in some sex work. In contrast, the highest percentage of participants reporting that PAR young mothers engaged in some sex work in Liberia was 50% in the most rural site. In Uganda, in all but three sites, 100% of participants reported that young mothers in the PAR did not engage in sex work. Only 10 participants total in Uganda said that young mothers in the PAR sometimes or regularly engaged in sex work.

Question 14.

I feel more supported and respected by community members now than I did before the project.

- In total 89.1% of participants reported "yes, I feel more supported and respected by community members now than I did before the project;" 5.3% sometimes; 5.6% no.
- There were no statistically significant differences by country or by associated total, but there is a significant difference between associated and non-associated in Sierra Leone, with more formerly associated participants reporting experiencing more support and respect from the community than non-associated participants.

Question 15.

Has your health changed since you joined the project?

- In total 87.0% of participants reported that their health was better; 10.9% reported that their health stayed the same; 2.0% reported that their health was worse.
- There were no significant differences by country or by formerly associated or not.

Question 16.

How has the health of your child or children changed since you joined the project?

- In total 83.7% of participants reported that their children's health was better; 14.3% reported that their children's health had stayed the same; 1.9% reported that their children's health was worse.
- There were no significant differences by country or by formerly associated or not.

Question 17.

I get pregnant even when I don't want to.

- In total, 67% reported that they did not get pregnant when they did not want to; 8.7% said they sometimes got pregnant when they did not want to; and 24.2% reported they did get pregnant when they did not want to.
- There were no differences by formerly associated or not. However, there were significant differences by country. Liberians reported significantly more difficulty preventing pregnancy with 62.5% of participants reporting yes or sometimes they get pregnant when they do not want to. In contrast, only 22% of Sierra Leoneans and 35% of Ugandans said yes or sometimes.

Question 18.

If someone wants to go to bed with me by force, I know how to report it and get help.

- In total, 86.8% of participants reported "yes, I know how to report and get help;" 0.7% sometimes; 12.5% no.
- There were no significant differences by country or by formerly associated or not.

Broader Correlations & Observations in the Data

- Those who reported an increase in family love during the project were also more likely to report being able to better care for their children, better able to support their families meet their basic needs, and better able to help others in the community.
- Those who reported being able to help others in the community were more also more likely to report feeling respected by the community.
- Those who reported that community members did not think worse of them were also more likely to report being able to care for their children better and to report feeling respected by community members.
- Those who reported feeling respected by the community were also more likely to report that they were comfortable speaking in public and that they were able to help others in the community.
- Those who reported being able to support their families by buying basic needs were also more likely to report that their health and the health of their child(ren) had improved.
- Those who reported that their boyfriends or husbands were unsupportive were more likely to report that they were unable to prevent pregnancy when they did not want to be pregnant.
- Those who reported having three new babies during the PAR were much more likely to report that they did not experience an increase in family love and that their children's health had not improved than those who had only one or two babies during the PAR. There was no additional relationship between the number of babies born during the PAR and family love or children's health when a women reported only having one or two babies during the PAR.
- In Uganda and Sierra Leone, those who reported that they were unable to prevent pregnancy were more likely to have had more children during the PAR. This was not the case in Liberia, which had the highest number of women report that they were unable to prevent pregnancy.