

CHAPTER 2:

LIVING IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS: FOCUS ON WOMEN, CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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Women in Conflict-affected Areas

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Women and conflict: overview

Women and girls suffer disproportionately from violent conflict. They suffer not only from the by-products of war, but are also targeted as a strategy of war. Rape and sexual violence have been recognised as instruments of war, designed to weaken families and break down the social fabric of communities and societies. Although men and boys are also victims of gender-based violence, women and girls are the primary target.

There is increasing acknowledgement that women and girls play multiple roles during conflict. They are not only victims of violence, but can also be active participants in the violence, directly as combatants, or indirectly, by facilitating violence through fundraising or inciting their male relatives to commit acts of violence. Women also often become heads of households during war; women and girls learn new skills and contribute to peacemaking and rebuilding local economies and communities. These changes in gender relations, however, are usually short-lived and societies resort back to traditional gender roles after conflict.

Women also tend to be sidelined from formal conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes, and post-conflict recovery programmes often overlook women's security needs. This compromises the inclusiveness and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts.

[United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325](#) (2000) on Women, Peace and Security recognises this shortfall. It addresses the impact of war on women, mandates the protection of women and girls during and after conflict and the greater involvement of women in conflict resolution, peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes.

[United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820](#) (2008) extends S/CR 1325 to explicitly recognise sexual violence as a security issue and tactic of war, demand parties to armed conflict to adopt concrete prevention and protection measures and assert the importance of women's participation in peace processes.

[United Nations, 2002, 'Women, Peace and Security', Study submitted by the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325 \(2000\), United Nations, New York](#)

How does armed conflict impact on women? What role do women play in the peace process? This study is an initiative undertaken in response to Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security adopted in October 2000. While it shows that many positive steps have been taken to implement the resolution, women still form a minority of those who participate in peace and security

negotiations, and receive less attention than men in post-conflict agreements, disarmament and reconstruction.

[Access full text: available online](#)

Rehn, E. and Johnson Sirleaf, E., 2002, 'Women, War and Peace', Independent Expert's Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building', United Nations Development Fund for Women, New York

[Access full text: available online](#)

BRIDGE, 2003, 'Gender and Armed Conflict', Institute of Development Studies, Brighton

[Access full text: available online](#)

Van der Gaag, 2008, 'Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls 2008 – Special Focus: In the Shadow of War', Plan International

[Access full text: available online](#)

Impact of violent conflict on women and girls

The literature on sexual violence in armed conflict indicates that rape and violence against women and girls prior to, during and after conflict is extensive in scope and magnitude throughout the world. Sexual violence is defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance as "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic a person's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless of relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work". Sexual violence, particularly rape, is often used as a weapon of war to destabilise families, groups and communities; to carry out ethnic cleansing and genocide; to instil fear in populations in order to dampen resistance and/or incite flight; as a form of punishment and torture; and to affirm aggression. The destabilisation of families and communities can contribute to other forms of violence, including domestic violence.

Sexual exploitation, trafficking and sexual slavery tend to increase in armed conflict. Women and girls who are recruited, often by abduction, into combat are in many cases forced to provide sexual services and/or are subjected to forced marriages. Refugee and internally displaced women and girls, separated from family members and traditional support mechanisms, are also particularly vulnerable. Government officials, civilian authorities, peacekeepers and aid workers have been reported to demand sexual favours in exchange for necessities - safe passage, food and shelter. Limited monitoring of camp security also renders women and girls vulnerable to sexual violence and forced combat.

Security issues hinder women and girls' access to services as well. When schools are destroyed for example, and children have to travel long distances, girls are more likely to stay at home in order to avoid the increased risk of abduction, sexual violence and exploitation.

Sexual violence

[Ward, J. and Marsh, M., 2006, 'Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in War and its Aftermath: Realities, Responses and Required Resources', Briefing Paper, United Nations Population Fund](#)

What is the extent and impact of gender-based violence during and after war? Statistics show that the sexual violation and torture of women and girls has become rife in conflict settings. Data also show that gender-based violence (GBV) does not subside post-conflict; certain types of GBV may even increase. This briefing paper from the United Nations Population Fund argues that while international prevention and response efforts have increased in recent years, much more must be done. A multi-sectoral model which demands holistic inter-organisational and inter-agency efforts across health, social services, legal and security sectors offers the best approach for GBV prevention.

[Access full text: available online](#)

[DCAF, 2007, 'Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Global Overview and Implications for the Security Sector', Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces](#)

[Access full text: available online](#)

[GSDRC, 2009, Conflict and Sexual and Domestic Violence against Women, Helpdesk Research Report, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, Birmingham](#)

The literature on sexual violence in armed conflict indicates that rape and violence against women and girls prior to, during and after conflict seem to be extensive in scope and magnitude throughout the world – with reported incidents in conflicts in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. Whilst there is limited comparative analysis and understanding about where sexual violence may be more or less prevalent and why, it is widely recognised that sexual violence against women in conflict is usually reflective of pre-existing patterns in society. Generally speaking, rape and violence against women is a good proxy indicator of rising tensions and incipient conflict. Much of the literature also emphasises the persistence of violence and exploitation in the 'post'-conflict, reconstruction phase.

[Access full text: available online](#)

[Benjamin, J. A., and Murchison, L., 2004, 'Gender-based Violence: Care and Protection of Children in Emergencies – A Field Guide', Save the Children, London](#)

[Access full text: available online](#)

Displacement

[Buscher, D., 2006, 'Displaced Women and Girls at Risk: Risk Factors, Protection Solutions and Resource Tools', Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, New York](#)

Why do large numbers of displaced women and girls continue to be abused, raped and exploited? This paper from the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children explores risks facing displaced women and how to address them. Women and girls must be involved in their own protection. Their communities, including the men, must be similarly engaged. Yet only individual assessment can adequately address women's unique protection concerns. Women and girls are not just victims but also survivors, caretakers, leaders, peacemakers and providers.

[Access full text: available online](#)

Access to services

[GSDRC, 2009, The Impact of Conflict on Women's Education, Employment and Health Care, Helpdesk Research Report, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, Birmingham](#)

The extent to which conflict restricts women's freedom of movement depends on a number of factors including the stage of conflict, whether the women are displaced, whether they are directly or indirectly affected by the conflict, and the cultural norms of the conflict-affected area. Forced displacement, for example, may in some cases lead to greater mobility, where women assume additional responsibilities such as taking on the role of primary breadwinner. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that the fear of violence more often than not restricts women's freedom of movement. In times of political, economic and social uncertainty, there is a strong tendency to revert to traditional values which appear to offer protection for women and girls but which restrict their mobility.

[Access full text: available online](#)

Young women and girls as fighters

[Coulter, C., Persson, M., and Utas, M., 2008, 'Young Female Fighters in African Wars: Conflict and Its Consequences', Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala](#)

What role do young women play in contemporary African wars? Mainstream thinking on war and conflict sees women as passive and peaceful and men as active and aggressive. This report from the Nordic Africa Institute calls for a broader understanding of women's roles and participation in armed conflict in Africa. Programmes to disarm, demobilise and re-integrate former fighters need to be adapted to local contexts and designed to meet the needs of female ex-fighters.

[Access full text: available online](#)

[Denov, M., 2007, 'Girls in Fighting Forces: Moving Beyond Victimhood', Canadian International Development Agency, Ottawa](#)

Girls within armed groups have generally been neglected by scholars, governments and policymakers. This Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) paper traces the experiences of girls in armed conflict in Angola, Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Uganda. It finds that girls in fighting forces are rendered invisible and marginalised during and after conflict, although they are fundamentally important to armed groups. They experience victimisation, perpetration and insecurity, but are also active agents and resisters.

[Access full text: available online](#)

Participation in Peace Processes, Reconstruction and Peacebuilding

Conflict can present new opportunities for women to assume different roles in society and to get involved in decision-making. Women often secure important gains within the family and local community and in broader political participation. Women are still usually sidelined, however, in formal conflict resolution and peace negotiation processes. This is especially problematic as the outcomes from these processes usually dictate the post-conflict landscape.

The inclusion of women in peace processes is essential as their participation contributes to the fulfilment of human rights norms of equal participation; allows for the articulation of different experiences and needs of women in conflict; and results in women as active agents in post-conflict recovery processes.

There are a few examples of women's involvement in formal processes and its positive impact. In Somalia, for example, women activists formed a 'Sixth Clan' (comprised of the five main clans involved in negotiations) and were successful in gaining access to the negotiating table. Their representation and advocacy at the table in turn led to the inclusion of quotas for women in new governance structures. In Afghanistan, the participation of women at the Bonn negotiations had a profound impact on the post-conflict environment – with the inclusion of women's rights in the Constitution and the inclusion of women in political decision-making roles.

Women have managed to play a critical role in informal negotiation processes as well – often preparing the ground for negotiations and bridging divides. Women's organisations and other international organisations and donors have also implemented training and capacity building workshops for women – to impart conflict mediation and resolution skills; and the skills necessary for political participation.

Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that these are exceptions and women are still largely marginalised in peace processes and as international mediators.

[Banaszak, K. et al., eds., 2005, 'Securing the Peace: Guiding the International Community towards Women's Effective Participation throughout Peace Processes,' United Nations Development Fund for Women](#)

How and why should women be involved in peace processes? This paper from the United Nations Development Fund for Women highlights the importance of involving women at every stage of peace negotiations and gives recommendations on how this might be achieved in practice. It argues that when approaching the task of ending war, the stakes are too high to neglect the resources that women have to offer.

[Access full text: available online](#)

[Chhabra, S., 2006, 'Gender Perspective in Peace Initiatives: Opportunities and Challenges,' Women's Link Journal](#)

How can women play a more effective role in peace initiatives? This research from the National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development in New Delhi argues that it is important to improve understanding of how women's and men's perspectives on peace and violence vary, and whether there are policy implications for these differences. A full understanding of the role of women as actors during war and conflict and as victims of war is essential to ensure full participation of women at all levels of decision-making and implementation in peace processes.

[Access full text: available online](#)

[Conaway, C.P., 2005, 'Charting Progress: The Role of Women in Reconstruction and Stabilisation Operations,' United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC](#)

To what extent are women included in reconstruction initiatives after conflict? This report from the United States Institute of Peace argues that despite progress within the United States government to recognise the importance of women's inclusion in stabilisation and reconstruction operations, no overarching strategy or programme exists to ensure implementation. An ongoing capability must be institutionalised

within the US government to enhance the role of women. Action taken prior to an intervention will improve the success of the mission.

[Access full text: available online](#)

[GSDRC, 2009, *The Impact of Conflict on Women's Voice and Participation*, Helpdesk Research Report, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, Birmingham](#)

Although conflict can reduce the voice of less powerful groups (including women), there are also opportunities for these groups to contest well-established social structures and divisions, and for new, non-traditional leaders to emerge. Women assume varied roles during armed conflict, as victims, but also as perpetrators, as well as peace activists. There are sub-groups of women who may be particularly vulnerable as a result of conflict and are frequently invisible in post-conflict peace processes and community-driven development, for example: young women, female-headed households, widows, and women from marginalised groups. However, women are not necessarily the only, or even the most, excluded group in a given society. Furthermore, female participation does not necessarily lead to positive outcomes for women. Not all women have equal voices or the same vested interests; other issues of identity, such as ethnicity, religion, and age can be equally important.

[Access full text: available online](#)

Gender analysis and gender-sensitivity in post-conflict recovery

Women, girls, men and boys participate in and experience conflict, peace processes and post-conflict recovery differently. Research has found that the needs of women and girls have often been neglected in assistance programmes. For example, women and girl combatants are often discriminated against in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes; and there is often a lack of provision of health services and trauma programmes for women and girls suffering from sexual violence.

New frameworks have been created and tested in order to promote understanding of the gender dimensions of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction.

[Hudson, H., 2006, 'Human Security and Peacebuilding Through a Gender Lens: Challenges of Implementation in Africa', DIIS Working Paper no. 2006/ 37, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen](#)

Why is it so difficult to translate an awareness of gender injustice into workable plans for post-conflict reconstruction? Evidence shows that while women are largely absent from formal peace negotiations, they do make a significant contribution at the grassroots level. Yet this gender awareness has not been incorporated into practice. This paper from the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) draws on African feminism to argue for a balanced position between cultural relativism and a 'one size fits all' solution to this problem.

[Access full text: available online](#)

[Greenberg, M. E. and Zuckerman, E., 2009, 'The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: The Challenges in Development Aid', in *Making Peace Work: The Challenges of Social and Economic Reconstruction*, eds. T. Addison and T. Brück, Palgrave MacMillan, UNU-WIDER, Helsinki](#)

Why do post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) programmes need to address gender relations and equality? How can gender be 'mainstreamed' in PCR interventions? This draft conference paper by Gender Action considers gender, particularly the needs of

women, in post-conflict situations. PCR programmes commonly fail to recognise and address gender issues. Investing in women and promoting gender equality are necessary both for maintaining peace and achieving sustainable development.

[Access full text: available online](#)

[The Peace and Conflict Gender Analysis: UNIFEM's Research in the Solomon Islands](#)

How can the use of gender analysis help improve post-conflict peace processes? This paper published in *Gender and Development* discusses the research methodology and results of the 2005 Peace and Conflict Gender Analysis (PCGA) conducted by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in the Solomon Islands. The use of gender analysis to shape peace processes would help solidify women's gains in status and contribute to economic and civil society development.

[Access full text: available online](#)

Anderlini, S. N., 2006, 'Mainstreaming Gender in Conflict Analysis: Issues and Recommendations', *Social Development Papers*, no. 33, World Bank, Washington, DC

[Access full text: available online](#)

Additional resources

For further discussion and resources on gender and peacekeeping, see 'gender, peacekeeping and protection' in the [peacekeeping and peace support operation](#) section of this guide.

For resources on gender and justice and security sector reform, see the 'women, security and conflict' section in [gender and justice](#) in the GSDRC's justice guide.

Children and Youth in Conflict-affected Areas

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Children, youth and conflict: overview

Millions of children and youth are caught up in violent conflict and suffer from its devastating impacts. Many are killed as a by-product of general disorder and violence, whereas in some situations, for example, in genocide, children and youth may be specifically targeted. They are also targeted and recruited, often but not always forcibly, as child combatants. Research has shown that war-affected children and youth, regardless of whether they have served as combatants, may suffer from severe emotional distress.

Literature on children and youth has tended to concentrate on their portrayals as passive victims or as active security threats, in the case of youth. There is increasing attention, however, on the need to focus as well on the resilience of children and youth and on their positive contributions to peace processes and reconstruction activities.

[Sommers, M., 2006, 'Youth and Conflict – A Brief Review of the Available Literature', USAID, Washington, DC](#)

How can programmes help youth in conflict and post-conflict situations? This literature review from USAID illuminates key themes, trends and prospects for war-affected youth and the programmes that aim to assist them. While war's effects on youth are complex, resilience is a prominent shared characteristic. Effective youth interventions require increased participation of female youth, better engagement with youth to determine and address their precise needs, quality programme evaluations and more dissemination of programme documents.

[Access full text: available online](#)

[UNDESA, 2003, 'Youth and Conflict', Chapter 14 of the World Youth Report, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York](#)

How can youth involvement in conflict be addressed? This study from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs shows that youth are often a targeted group during conflict. It argues that traditional prevention mechanisms have proved top-heavy and ineffective in addressing the root causes of conflict and problems leading to the escalation of tensions. In tackling conflict, the international community must go beyond the narrow approach determined by top-level ideals of peace and embrace cross-sectoral approaches.

[Access full text: available online](#)

UNICEF, 1996, 'Impact of Armed Conflict on Children', UNICEF, New York

[Access full text: available online](#)

UNDP, 2006, 'Youth and Violent Conflict: Society and Development in Crisis?', United Nations Development Programme, New York

[Access full text: available online](#)

Child combatants, mobilisation and war-affected youth

The precise number of child combatants globally is unknown. The figure most frequently cited is 300,000, most of which are adolescents. Key negative impacts for combatants have been found to be psychological distress concentrated in those that experience the most violence; loss of human capital due to time away from civilian education and work experience; and social exclusion, as former child fighters are considered tainted and impure.

The literature has tended to focus on child combatants as boys who are abducted and coerced into fighting. The role of girls in fighting forces is largely neglected, and girls have consequently been excluded from recovery programmes. There has also been limited examination of situations in which children and youth are not abducted but are mobilised in other ways. Some recent work has looked at youth agency and the role of the desire for status and a sense of empowerment. New research has shown that children and youth in displacement camps may become motivated to engage in political violence due to frustrations and the distinctiveness of life in a camp and the politicisation of everyday experiences.

Reintegration packages have generally focused on education, income generation and livelihoods. Youth often prefer support for income generation and livelihoods as they find it difficult to return to school with children much younger than them. In order to counter the social exclusion of former child combatants, initiatives have also included community based projects in order to make the receiving village more receptive to the former combatants' reintegration.

[Blattman, C., 2006, 'The Consequences of Child Soldiering', Households in Conflict Network Working Paper 22, The Institute of Development Studies, Brighton](#)

Hundreds of thousands of child combatants fought in recent civil wars in Africa, yet little is known about the long-term impact of child soldiering. Using data collected in Uganda, this paper from the Households in Conflict Network (HiCN), finds that, contrary to existing evidence, that the major consequences of child soldiering are educational and economic. Exposure to conflict also seems to increase political participation by abductees, and the psychological impacts of war appear to be moderate and concentrated in a minority. More research is needed to inform evidence-based post-conflict policies and programs.

[Access full text: available online](#)

[Denov, M., 2007, 'Girls in Fighting Forces: Moving Beyond Victimhood', Canadian International Development Agency, Ottawa](#)

Girls within armed groups have generally been neglected by scholars, governments and policymakers. This Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) paper traces the experiences of girls in armed conflict in Angola, Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Uganda. It finds that girls in fighting forces are rendered invisible and marginalised during and after conflict, although they are fundamentally important to armed groups. They experience victimisation, perpetration and insecurity, but are also active agents and resisters.

[Access full text: available online](#)

Hart J ., 2008, 'Displaced Children's Participation in Political Violence: Towards Greater Understanding of Mobilisation', *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 277-293

[Access full text: available online](#)

[Housden, O., 2009, 'In a Weak State: Status and Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed forces and Armed Groups \(CAAFAG\) in Nepal', *IPCS Research Paper, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi*](#)

Despite Nepal's 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) targeting rehabilitation of children from armed group associations, the government has failed to implement satisfactory reintegration. This paper, published by the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, reviews the current status of the reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG). State failure to tackle deep-rooted inequality and structural problems continues to allow armed movements to recruit marginalised groups, including children, and consequently flourish.

[Access full text: available online](#)

McIntyre, A . (ed.), 2004, 'Invisible Stakeholders: Children and War in Africa', Institute for Security Studies, South Africa

[Access full text: available online](#)

For discussion and resources on gender-based violence against women and girls, see the section on [women in conflict-affected areas](#) in this guide.

Dissatisfied youth and youth bulges

Youth bulge refers to "extraordinarily large youth cohorts relative to the adult population" (Urdal 2007). A large pool of young people is not inherently destabilising; however, some analysts argue that there is a correlation between youth bulges and political violence, in particular under conditions of economic stagnation. While contested, the understanding is that young people - particularly young men, who are jobless and alienated, and have few outlets for positive engagement, are ready recruits for those seeking to mobilise violence. Thus, it is argued that more attention needs to be paid to providing employment or education opportunities to youth, particularly during times of economic decline. Limits on migration may increase the risk of violence in some countries with large youth bulges if it is not compensated for by increased domestic employment opportunities.

The countries expected to experience high relative youth populations in years to come are mostly situated in the Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia.

[Urdal, H., 2007, 'The Demographics of Political Violence: Youth Bulges, Insecurity and Conflict' Chapter 6 in *Too Poor for Peace? Global Poverty, Conflict and Security in the 21st Century*, eds. L. Brainard and D. Chollet, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, pp. 90-100](#)

This book chapter from the Brookings Institution Press reports study findings suggesting that demographic 'youth bulges' may provide both a motive and an opportunity for political violence. These bulges increase the risk of internal armed conflict, terrorism, and rioting, but the conditions under which they are most volatile

seem to differ. Bulges appear to particularly increase the risk of terrorism and riots under conditions of educational and economic stress, but to provide greater opportunities for armed conflict in autocracies and greater motives in democracies.

[Access full text: available online](#)

[Hilker, L. M., Fraser E. M., 2009, 'Youth Exclusion, Violence, Conflict and Fragile States', Report prepared for DFID by Social Development Direct, London](#)

What factors contribute to youth exclusion and increase the likelihood of youth engagement in violence? How can DFID effectively address issues of youth exclusion and violence? This report from Social Development Direct examines existing evidence and analysis on the links between youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states. It highlights factors which can contribute to youth violence, and makes recommendations for DFID's work on youth exclusion and violence.

[Access full text: available online](#)

For additional resources on youth and social exclusion, see the GSDRC's [social exclusion](#) guide.

Participation of children and youth in recovery and peacebuilding

There is growing recognition that children and youth need to be engaged in positive activities; and that they have much to contribute to peace processes, reconstruction and peacebuilding initiatives. Children and youth have already been making effective contributions to various programmes, including those focused, for example, on rebuilding social relationships, developing cultures of peace, rehabilitating education systems, and promoting livelihoods and economic recovery.

Involvement in such activities can counter the traumatising and destructive experiences of violence that war-affected children and youth have undergone. More broadly, it provides positive and constructive roles for youth that render them less susceptible to mobilisation to violence.

[USAID, 2005, 'Youth and Conflict: A Toolkit for Intervention', USAID, Washington, DC](#)

Why do young people participate in conflict? What can be done to steer young people away from violence? This toolkit from USAID examines youth participation in violent conflict and draws out lessons for development programming. It asserts that although a large proportion of young people is not necessarily destabilising, those (particularly young men) who are uprooted, intolerant, jobless and have few opportunities could represent a ready pool of recruits for ethnic, religious and political extremists. Avoiding future conflict means drawing positively on the energy and capacity of youth as the leaders of tomorrow's societies.

[Access full text: available online](#)

[Fischer, M., 2006, 'The Need for Multi-Dimensional Youth Work: Education, Interethnic Networking and Income Generation', in Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ten Years after Dayton, ed. M. Fischer, Lit Verlag, Münster](#)

How can youth in postconflict societies become a catalyst for positive change? This research from the Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management gives an overview of the challenges facing youth work in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It presents the 'Young People Build the Future' project, which uses a multidimensional

approach to try to meet some of these challenges. An integrated combination of initiatives that provide training, empowerment, peace education, vocational training and income generation opportunities is essential.

[Access full text: available online](#)