



## A Systematic Policy Analysis of Early Childhood Development and Peacebuilding in fourteen Conflict-affected and Post-conflict countries

Conflict and fragile conditions that arise as a result of adversities such as civil wars, deprivation and emergency situations invariably compromise the lives of children. This research investigated policies in conflict-affected and post-conflict countries for possible links between early childhood development and peacebuilding.



### EXISTING POLICIES

A multilevel, ecological model linking young children to conflict and peace that is supported by growing research evidence from biological and social science is reflected in national policies of conflict affected countries.

Placing children at the centre of policy analysis revealed opportunities for them as active participants and agents of change to promote social cohesion.

Focusing on children and early childhood development as a cross-cutting policy issue can leverage broader national agendas such as promotion of education and social reintegration in conflict affected countries.

\* These findings are illustrated in the figure and examples on the following pages.

### POLICY GAPS

Young children (0-8), and the value of early childhood development for building cohesive societies, are not featured strongly in most national policies.

A clear, explicit policy focus on early childhood development, and the connections between children, families and peacebuilding was inconsistent across the fourteen countries.

There was no mention of the growing evidence from neuroscience about stressful environments harming children's brain development, nor any aspiration of mitigating such long term consequences. Liberia and Myanmar were exceptional in acknowledging the importance of early environments on brain development.

There was limited evidence of evaluation indicators and criteria set for monitoring effectiveness and progress of policies and policy interventions.

### WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION?

Move early childhood development and peacebuilding up the policy ladder within a wider context of public participation in policy development and implementation.

Leverage early childhood development to promote community building and intergroup social cohesion in the reconciliation process.

Develop clear national policies and time-bound policy strategies that focus on early childhood development and peacebuilding.

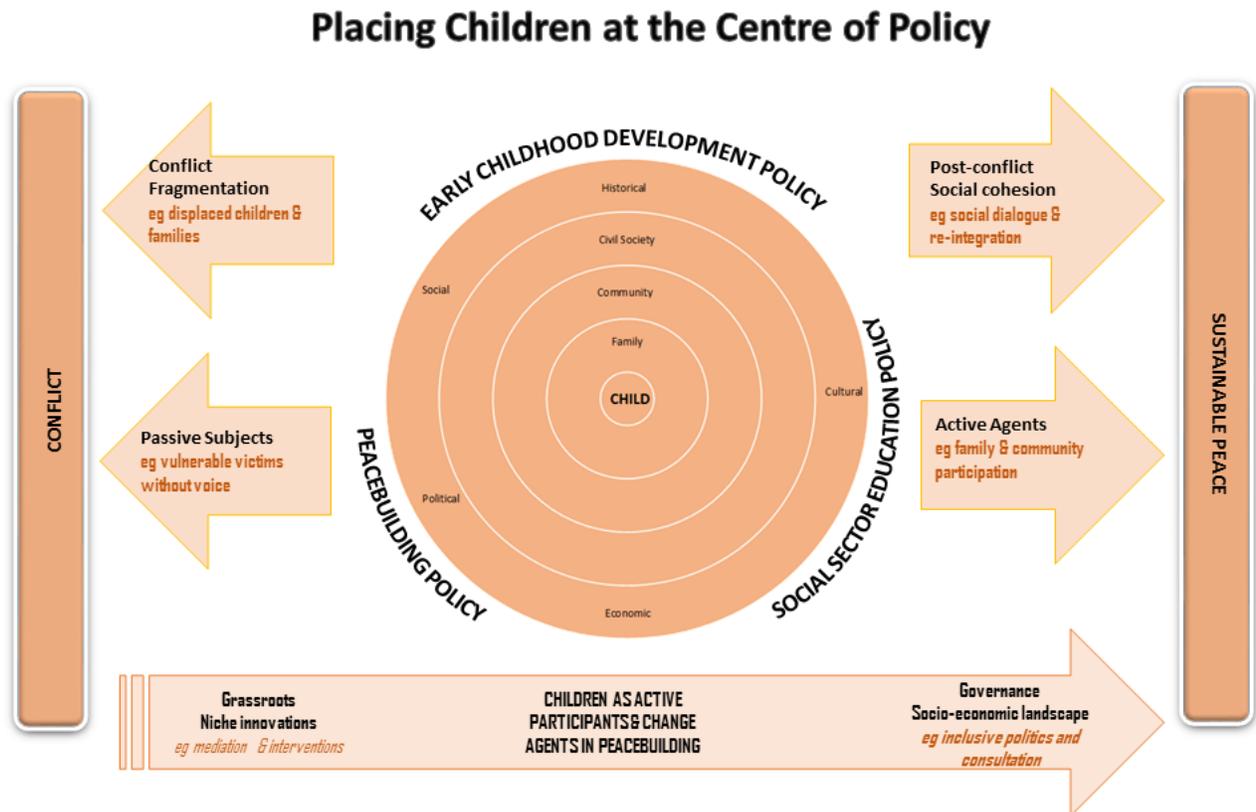
Strengthen policies and programmes that support the integral role of young children and families in bringing about reconciliation and breaking the cycle of intergenerational conflict.

Strengthen policies and programmes that enable the participation and inclusion of young children and families in peacebuilding.

Strengthen accurate and comprehensive data on policy monitoring and implementation to promote more effective policy-making.

## WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH?

Harsh environments have a negative impact on children, with evidence from neuroscience offering explanations and prompting efforts to ameliorate stress that results from conflict (Leckford et al 2014).<sup>1</sup> Reversing such impacts by intervening with children and families to encourage peace currently rests largely on theoretical links between behaviour, empathy, communication and social skills. With this study providing a greater understanding of the policy landscape, opportunities arise for natural experiments or exploratory analyses to strengthen the empirical evidence with social, political and biological science. We recommend comparing the impact of interventions (in existing or new studies) in different policy environments: where children are portrayed as active or passive members of society, and where public participation in developing national policy and local services is more or less developed.



## HOW THE RESEARCH WAS DONE

This research brief summarises the findings of a systematic analysis of early childhood development and peacebuilding policies in fourteen conflict-affected and post-conflict countries - **Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Liberia, Myanmar, Pakistan, State of Palestine, Sierra Leone, Somali, South Sudan, Uganda and Yemen.**

Three main policy datasets were reviewed: a total of 75 national policies relating to early childhood development, peacebuilding, and social sector policies (available in English, French and Arabic). After a comprehensive search of ministerial and international policy databases, policies relating to early childhood development were analysed for components of peacebuilding and, conversely, peacebuilding policies were scrutinised for evidence of potential links with young children (0 to 8 years) and early childhood development. A multilevel conceptual framework was developed to understand each policy focus and the portrayal of children and their roles in peacebuilding. The findings were informed by an in-depth analyses of empirical research.<sup>2</sup> A cross-country comparative analysis of policies was conducted across fourteen countries. The analysis was complemented by consultations with key informants at UNICEF national offices and government ministries through an online questionnaire and interviews.

## POLICY OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT FOR PEACEBUILDING

### **Strengthen strong relationships between children and families in mitigating the negative impact of conflict.**

In Sierra Leone (2007), policies give an important role to families and family engagement in promoting education and social cohesion, and in promoting reintegration of displaced children and families (eg refugees and child-soldiers) in post-conflict situations.<sup>3</sup> In the Democratic Republic of Congo, an annual forum for dialogue focused on preventing the economic exploitation of children and young people contributes to sustainable post-conflict development (Democratic Republic of Congo 2013).<sup>4</sup>

### **Seek the perspectives and participation of children on policy issues that affect them.**

In Somalia, mounting an inclusive political dialogue with representatives from all segments of society in each region (women, young people, civil society organisations, traditional elders, religious leaders, diaspora and business community) was critical for reconciliation and healing between communities at the local level, to restore trust through community dialogue and mediation (Somalia 2013).<sup>5</sup> In Liberia, children's participation in schooling and education through a community-based 'Child Friendly Schools (CFS) model' helped to promote the principles of inclusion and democratic participation (Liberia Ministry of Education 2010).<sup>6</sup>

### **Raise the visibility of children, particularly young children (0 to 8) in policy.**

In Myanmar, a clear policy focus on children 0-8 years was exemplified by the Myanmar Policy for Early Childhood Care and Development which promotes national development, collaboration, and social dialogue among governmental, non-governmental, faith-based and community-based organisations in working towards social cohesion (Myanmar Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, Resettlement 2014).<sup>7</sup>

### **Promote dialogue and consultation at the level of policy development and implementation.**

In Liberia, widespread national consultation in the community was instrumental in developing the education policy (Liberia 2010) and Intersectoral Policy on Early Childhood Development (Liberia 2011).<sup>8</sup> The Intersectoral policy recognises the role of civil society participation and partnerships with faith-based and non-governmental organisations.

### **Promote policy interventions that foster resilience in children and families.**

In Somalia, the national education policy aims to strengthen systems that build capacity while fostering resilience of children and their families through access to quality education services (Somalia Federal Republic 2013).<sup>9</sup>

### **Leverage opportunities to foster positive relationships among displaced or estranged groups through early childhood development.**

In Sierra Leone, the provision of interim care services that includes 'family tracing, counselling and primary health care and reunification' (p30) provides reintegration opportunities for children who have been displaced or disengaged from their families and host communities (Sierra Leone National Recovery Committee 2002).<sup>10</sup>



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