

Evaluation of the project:

Prevention of child recruitment and community-based reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups

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UNICEF and its implementing partners
Peace Building Fund (Principle Donor)



About this report

This evaluation report is not a traditional one!
Here are some information to better use and navigate it.



It is formatted for skim reading

This report is formatted for skim reading. You do not need to read from start to end; you can skip through. Key ideas have been emphasized in bold, with bullet point, highlights, visuals.



It uses visuals and links to interactive resources

The report links to interactive resources, to better share analysis. Readers are invited to explore and navigate them: the interactive resources are better fit for complex thinking. They provide insights that a narrative simply cannot capture.

Ideally would have loved to complement the report with video, pictures, first hand testimonies but not possible because of sensitivity of the programme



It structured information in practical chunks

There was a massive investment in breaking analysis in stand-alone units. Ideas were distilled in self-contained sections, rather than using expansive narratives. Findings were summed as checklists of ideas, to be practical tools for discussion and action.

All these chunks are clearly connected to the overall structure, and cross-referenced. Please note that making chunks stand-alone involved, in a few cases, some minor repetitions.



It is a discussion starter, not the final word

The evaluation is aware that a lot more could be told about the programme. That there are different views and perspectives. That findings could be challenged and/or improved. The ambition of the evaluation is not to have the last word, but to be a discussion starter.



It presents many learning points, rather than few broad recommendations

Having split content in small, self-contained chunks, the report tried to link them to actionable ideas. Recommendations and ideas are not to be found on the end page: they are interspersed throughout the report. Managers could use the report as a learning manual A the end of the report, in lieu of recommendations, there are big questions. The evaluation has not the ambitions to have the right answer. If simply tried to harvest relevant questions to shape the way forward. Because when questions are clear, getting to answer is easier.



It is complemented by a practical companion

A main finding of this evaluation was the weakness of M&E system, and the need to transform it. The practical ideas proposed are all collected in a companion report: "Ideas for a M&E framework".

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Glossary

AS	Al Shabaab (Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen)
CAAFAG	Children associated with armed forces and groups
IOM	International Organization for Migration
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoIS	Ministry of Internal Security
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoWHRD	Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NISA	National Intelligence and Security Agency
PBF	Peace Building Fund
SNA	Somali National Army
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Please also note that the evaluation will look both at “project” and “programme”

- **Project** – refers to the specific PBF project being evaluated: *Prevention of child recruitment and community-based reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups* - October 2021)
- **Programme** – refers to the overall interventions in support to CAAFAG children by UNICEF in Somalia

About the evaluation

The brief

Evaluation purpose [as per TORs]

This project evaluation presents an opportunity to assess the achievements of a project implemented by UNICEF, titled, *Prevention of child recruitment and community-based reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups and to determine its overall added value to peacebuilding in Somalia*, in the areas of preventing and responding to child recruitment and community reintegration. In assessing the degree to which the project met its intended peacebuilding objective(s) and results, the evaluation will provide key lessons about successful peacebuilding approaches and operational practices, as well as highlight areas where the project performed less effectively than anticipated. In that sense, this project evaluation is equally about accountability as well as learning. The endline evaluation covers a period of two years from November 2019 to Oct 2021 and will be conducted in 30 days.

Evaluation objectives [as per TORs]

- Assess the **relevance and appropriateness of the project** in terms of: 1) addressing **key drivers of conflict** and the most relevant peacebuilding issues; 2) **alignment with the National development Plan and UNCF**; 3) whether the **project capitalized on the UN's added value in Somalia**; and 4) the degree to which the project **addressed cross-cutting issues such as conflict and gender-sensitivity in Somalia**;
- Use available data to conduct a **trend analysis** (2019-2021) demonstrating how the PBF project has contributed to the reduction of child recruitment in armed forces and groups in Somalia.
- Evaluate the **project's efficiency**, including its implementation strategy, institutional arrangements as well as its management and operational systems and value for money.
- Assess whether the project promoted **gender equality and women empowerment**.
- Assess whether the project has been implemented through a **conflict-sensitive approach**.
- Document **good practices, innovations** and lessons emerging from the project;
- Provide **actionable recommendations** for future programming.

Evaluation scope [as per TORs]

The programmatic scope for this evaluation is child affected by armed conflict. This evaluation will examine the project's implementation process and peacebuilding results, drawing upon the project's results framework as well as other monitoring data collected on the project outputs and outcomes as well as context. Evaluation questions are based on the OECD DAC evaluation criteria as well as PBF specific evaluation criteria, which have been adapted to the context.

The successful consultant should take care to ensure that evaluation of the peacebuilding result is the main line of inquiry. Peacebuilding projects frequently employ approaches that work through thematic areas that overlap with development or humanitarian goals. An evaluation of peacebuilding projects, however, must include not only reflection on progress within the thematic area but the degree to which such progress may or may not have contributed to addressing the relevant conflict factor.

The geographic scope of this end-line evaluation will be Mogadishu, Kismayo and Baidoa. UNICEF and its partners (Ministry of Internal Security, Ministry of Defence, Elman Peace Foundation, IIDA and INTERSOM) run prevention and response activities for children formally associated with armed groups and forces. The bidder must ensure gender dimensions are included in the selection of interviewers and interviewees. The geographic scope must demonstrate adherence to equity to ensure a balanced coverage.

NB. The evaluation does not cover project impact, and project beneficiaries will not participate in the process. Evaluability assessments will be based on four interim progress reports and two final reports covering 2020 and 2021. Global horizontal notes, implementing partner progress reports and the SRS-CAAC annual report on children and armed conflict will also be used.

Evaluation approach

It is **not easy to evaluate a complex programme**, as this one is, and in the **context of Somalia**. The inception phase helped to set **realistic expectations** about the evaluation focus, through a quick **evaluability assessment**. What could be done? What was not achievable? Limitations were many, but the evaluation commitment was to **transform limitations into opportunities for a deeper, meaningful evaluation**. The evaluator involved is not a traditional one (meaning: oriented to compliance, affirming his expertise, checking achievements on the blueprint). She is **rather a facilitator of learning**, keen to **capture emergent trends** and possibilities and to **systematize them within a broader picture**. She employs **evaluation criteria helping to track meaningful changes** – not just pre-established outcomes, and to **looks at processes, not only results**. This, as agreed with evaluation management, was the approach that this programme needed: to avoid producing yet another report, but, rather, to take stock on the project so far, and to consolidate unfolding strategies, in novel formats.

Considering all the above, this evaluation is best framed as a “**critical and strategic documentation of the programme**”. It harvested available evidence. It consolidated common ground for the way forward.

Evaluation principles

The evaluation process was guided by the following principles (as presented in the inception report)



Sensemaking, appreciation of complexity

This was an ambitious project, involving many diverse stakeholders, in a difficult setup. Its complexity needs to be appreciated! This means not to stop at scattered results and indicators, but gain a broad perspective on how change happens: what are the drivers? What are the systems at play? What processes are in use? What transformations are sought and achieved? Criteria suited to appreciate complexity were used.



Adaptiveness

The evaluation was adaptive. From the start, it was not designed to follow a set workplan. It evolved in response to emerging findings. It practiced curiosity when connecting with programme stakeholders. The adaptive approach helped to deal with the many challenges encountered: the difficulties to get hold of stakeholders – remotely and in presence; the very limited possibilities of movement and engagement when in Somalia.



Mixing methods (and make the best of available evidence)

The evaluation mixed methods: it analysed quantitative data through dashboards. It conducted interviews. It used participants observation. It used network analysis.



Facilitation

The stance of the evaluator was to be a facilitator, not a judging expert. This means not to impose her perspective, but to harvest and connects the different experiences and perspectives of the project stakeholders.



Learning orientation

The facilitative stance mattered because the project evidently built on and generated an impressive amount of experience and understanding on CAAFAG dynamics in Somalia. Yet this wealth of knowledge was little captured. Evaluations powerful exercises to support learning. Compliance was already addressed by monitoring, so this evaluation did not focus on checking adherence to the blueprint. It looked beyond it, in the zone where challenges, opportunities, learning are to be found.



Accountability orientation (first and foremost with primary beneficiaries).

The evaluation was keen to capture as much as possible, the voice, the experience, the aspirations of marginalized and disempowered people – first and foremost the children associated with armed forces and their communities. And to shift perspectives, in presenting findings, to make them more child-centerer-rather than project-centred. It was however quite challenging to do so, given travelling limitations.



Communication orientation.

For an evaluation to be used, it should be communicated. And reporting is, unfortunately, quite a poor form of communication. The evaluation and its companion employed a range of tools to ensure better communication (e.g. cartooning, diagramming, interactive tools, etc). Real-time evidence sharing happened also throughout the evaluation process, through a working blog.



Forward looking

Evaluations should equip people to better work on future challenges. The evaluation had, from the start, stressed its forward-looking perspective. Looking only at past achievements and challenges would not have been relevant: a new project was already in place; things had moved on!

Evaluation activities

The evaluation started end of April 2022. The initial phase was conducted remotely. At the inception the approach was discussed with management. The project documentation was revised. Analysis tools were set, building on existing evidence. Remote interviews were conducted with key informants. The evaluator also participated – as active observant – to events and conversation for the setup of the subsequent project. The evaluator travelled to Somalia from 23rd to 29th June and conducted face to face interviews and visits to the centres. Information and analysis were then consolidated for sharing – through diverse products.



Literature review

Review of documentation / references provided by UNICEF of other relevant CAAFAG literature.



Review of systems and processes in place.

The evaluation explored systems and processes already in place, to understand 1) how they had supported the programme so far and 2) to collect available evidence from them.



Analysis of existing monitoring datasets (and simulations with pilot ones)

The evaluation tried to maximize the use of existing evidence (e.g., analysing data from the project monitoring systems in interactive dashboards). It was extremely hard to find usable datasets, and the available ones did not really allow for much insight. Hence the choice to simulate options for analysis – to get practical feedback on needed improvements re: evidence collection and use.



Setup of alternative, innovative evidence collection, analysis, sharing tools

Better tools for data gathering and analysis (stakeholders' analysis, data dashboards, timelines, blogs...) could help the programme to better track and share its achievements and learning. The evaluation piloted their use and populated them with available evidence. This did not lead to final and polished products (i.e., containing checked, filtered, verified information). It was nevertheless possible to 1) generate broad brush analysis and 2) exemplify concrete options for the programme.



Remote conversations (individual and group ones)

Remote conversations (through conferencing software) involved:

- *Evaluation management* – to discuss the evaluation approach (which constantly evolved) as well as their experience with the programme.
- *UNICEF staff and consultants* – directly involved in the project or supporting it (e.g., by managing organization-level systems)
- *Project partners* (implementing organizations, governmental actors)

Key informants were selected in consultation with the UNICEF evaluation managers, and with a snowballing approach. Reaching key informants proved, however, challenging. The effort put in organizing conversation did not always translate in actual interviews. Conversations were free flowing (no checklist of question was prepared). The focus was outlining the informant's experience of the programme. They were invited to share strengths, challenges, lessons learnt, ideas.



Participation in conversations and meeting about the new, ongoing project

When the evaluation happened, a new project was already in place (IOM/UNICEF). Involvement in inception and initial activities was an excellent option for participant observation, to better understand the context and the trajectory of the work. It also helped to understand what learning could better suit the programme. Engagement included access to email exchanges, participation to conference calls and to the inception meeting.



Face to face conversations

Even in country, the possibility to meet people face to face was extremely limited (given to security concerns, limited possibility of movement, positive cases to COVID).

Face to face conversations involved staff from UNICEF and from government institutions (e.g., MoD, MoIS) as well as implementing NGOs representatives.

Also in this case, the approach was an active listening one: a free-flowing conversation, leading to appreciate informant's role in the project, their views on the change achieved, insights on practices and learnings, experience-based ideas for improvements.



Visits to centres.

This was really **the heart of the evaluation**. Organizing the visits was hard. It required a **lot of planning and support** – because of contractual, logistical, security issues. Although short, the visits **provided unique insights in the programme**.

The evaluation could access the **Elman centre in Mogadishu** (for a 2 hours visit, which also included the new UNICEF rep in country). and the **INTERSOM Training and Interim centres in Kismayo** (a total of around 5 hours in the two locations, plus additional time for in depth discussion with Management at the hotel premises). It was the first visit of a foreigner in Kismayo centre (and even UNICEF local staff had limited access to the facilities, the last visit dating back to 2020). So, whilst apparently minimal, **getting field exposure was a major achievement for the evaluation**. Visit to centres allowed for **observation of the facilities and on the ongoing activities**; for **direct interaction with children** as they engaged in their vocational training (avoiding singling out children for individual or group interviews); for **conversation with management /support staff**. Conversations, were **free flowing and informal**, building on clues from the environment. We usually started by discussing the activity children were engaged in (did they enjoy it? What they were expecting from it?) to then discuss various topics (their passions and interests, their process of settling into the centre and the community, their hopes and challenges for the future, the progress done so far, their existing linkages with the community of origin...). Pictures were taken (being aware of confidentiality, safety issues), it was not possible to also get videos.

Sharing the findings (evaluation products)

This evaluation does not believe that “an evaluation is a report”. It believes that an evaluation is a process effectively communicate findings and learnings to its audience, for use.



Inception report

An inception report was produced. It highlighted the evaluation approach and explained how it can deepen and broaden the findings as compared to the original TORs. The inception report made explicit the principles driving the evaluation. Building on an evaluability assessment (what can be achieved? What are the likely limitations? What is the anticipated use?) it revised the criteria proposed (OECD/DEC) and suggested new ones more responsive to the nature and the aspiration of the programme (based on Michael Patton's [transformational criteria](#)). Key content of the inception report (e.g., principles, criteria, approach) has been added to this final report.



Informal debriefs

The evaluation shaped up in continuous discussion with the evaluation management. They were informed about progresses, challenges and – together – we planned the way forward. Informal debriefs also involved some project stakeholders (e.g., implementing partners, UNICEF staff: preliminary findings and ideas – in particular re: the future approach to M&E – were shared with them to build ownership, to get their insights and reactions.



Evaluation blog and interactive online tools

The consultant maintained an evaluation diary (using a blog) for the evaluation. Given the sensitivity of the programme it was restricted to the evaluation managers. It also aggregates interactive online tools proposed by the evaluation (timeline, dashboards, network mapping).



Visuals, infographics

The evaluation used visuals for sharing evidence (e.g., cartoons, photos, infographics) Some of these visuals are integrated in the report and in the companion resource. They could of course be used as stand alone, to illustrate specific findings and ideas.



Evaluation report

This evaluation report consolidates findings. It is written knowing that people busy to implement project have little time to read a report from start to end. Key learning, action points are captured and highlighted throughout the report. The hope is that this report is not just read and shelved, but that it can be used as a reference for the future of the programme.



Final presentation

The original TOR for the evaluation calls for final presentation of findings to key stakeholders. A date / audience has not been set yet. It is strongly recommended that a final presentation is set and designed to be participatory: findings will then be an opportunity to consolidate learning and to discuss and co-generate ideas for a way forward.



Ideas for a M&E (monitoring and evaluation) framework.

It became quickly evident that the programme insufficiently managed to capture change and learning. Reporting requirements were the main worry. They absorbed time and energy, and this reduced the space to capture changes in alternative ways that, beyond donors, could also satisfy the other key stakeholders of the programme. One key recommendation was then to improve the M&E of the programme. But how, in practice? Suggestions, ideas have been consolidated in a stand-alone resource.

Limitations

Limitations started surfacing in the description of the activities. They are consolidated here, also pointing out to the silver lining: ☺ what could be done once the limitation was acknowledged? The evaluation approach is that any limitation should be dealt as a possibility. Having flexibility in the process and engaging with responsive management helped a great deal.

	The silver lining
 <p>The challenge</p> <p>Available evidence</p> <p>This was a major limitation: available evidence was really limited.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicators collected by the project reveal very little about its dynamics of change. They are project-oriented rather than child-oriented, Beyond reporting, additional evidence to track the evolution of the programme was sparse and limited. Evidence on some outcomes (e.g., on the community support side) was extremely limited.: It was not possible to get hold on related materials (e.g., training for curricula, reports of meetings...) Reports submitted by UNICEF implementing partners did not add much detail on their activities, and it was not possible to access additional information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The evaluation could have a role in bringing together scattered evidence / understanding (e.g., in system maps) as a basis for further work. The evaluation should not stop at highlighting limitations of the M&E system or at making generic recommendations. It should be proactive and propose and consolidate ideas for improvement in practical ways.
 <p>Access to centres, children, communities.</p> <p>The evaluator travelled to Somalia, but security was a big concern. This massively limited out-of-compound activities. It mattered because the evaluation was designed to have unfiltered interactions in location (i.e.: not the type of evaluation where enumerators are sent on the ground). She could spend 2 hours in the Elman centre in Mogadishu – as part of a broader UNICEF visit, and 5 hours in the facilities of Kismayo. No further access to other local institutions, to host community members, to child carers, to local markets, etc. was possible in the time available and keeping in mind security considerations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This limited presence was already quite an achievement, given the existing restrictions The time spent in Kismayo was also an opportunity for in depth discussion with the local partner representative.
 <p>Reaching out to key stakeholders.</p> <p>A massive amount of time was invested to expand the informant's basis, but it remained quite limited. Beside security and access challenges, additional ones included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Long chains.</i> UNICEF did not directly implement the project but relied on partners. Reaching people involved in activities required going through a long chain of contacts. And, unfortunately, this chain stopped before reaching informants on the ground. <i>Sensitivities.</i> Some partnerships, substantially changed during the life of the project. It was still possible to access some involved institutions, but with care. <i>Missing actors:</i> an implementing partner left the country, and it was not possible to reach them (even through HQs). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limitations in accessing informants involved in the past project strengthened the emphasis on a “forward looking” approach.
 <p>Opportunities of participatory engagement</p> <p>The evaluation intended to run participatory team exercises, to harvest insights from stakeholders. It was simply not possible to do so: it was not possible to organize a meeting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having spotted a gap in information consolidation, the evaluation oriented its analysis to

in presence with stakeholders, given time and security constraints. Using online platforms was also not an option given the limited connectivity (limiting the use of online platforms such as Miro or Murals).

systematize existing information. Infographics, system diagrams presented in this report are an important evaluation product.



Staff time and priorities

When the evaluation took place, a new programme was ongoing and key programme staff left office, with a short notice.

- **Staff was already under pressure.** By adding more demands to people's time (by asking for interviews, or to set up activities) the evaluation could be detrimental to ongoing work.
- **an evaluator might be an elephant in a glass shop.** An evaluation is not a neutral exercise: interviews, conversations might trigger thinking shifts. Being aware of what trajectory the project is already on is crucial to ensure that thinking shifts support rather than hinder change.

- The evaluator was a participant observant in the setup activities for the new project. Her role – as an external consultant, not as UNICEF staff – was clarified to partners. Participation in setup activities allowed for a much deeper, hands-on understanding of challenges, opportunities, strategies. And for the possibility to input, in the new project, preliminary ideas and findings
- The evaluation was appreciative: pointing to opportunities, rather than slowing momentum.



Time lag

The evaluation findings could not inform the new proposal, as it was already ongoing.

- **the next project (part of a long-term programme) is already running.** The project is part of a long-term programme. **memories could be blurred.** Trying to stop at understanding changes linked to the previous project could be challenging (and not useful)
- **the evaluation should not undermine UNICEF stance (avoiding projectization).** Pushing partners to wear "project lenses" might undermine UNICEF stance, of avoiding projectization. Partners (especially at the grassroots) are aware of the programme, less so about the details of "projects" UNICEF is using to fund them

- The evaluation understood that its added value would not be to "report on a past project", but, rather, to understand how the project fit in the longer trajectory of change.
- The evaluation was seen by staff as an opportunity: to take stock on progress so far, to capture learning and strategic insights at risk of being lost



A note on security in humanitarian spaces

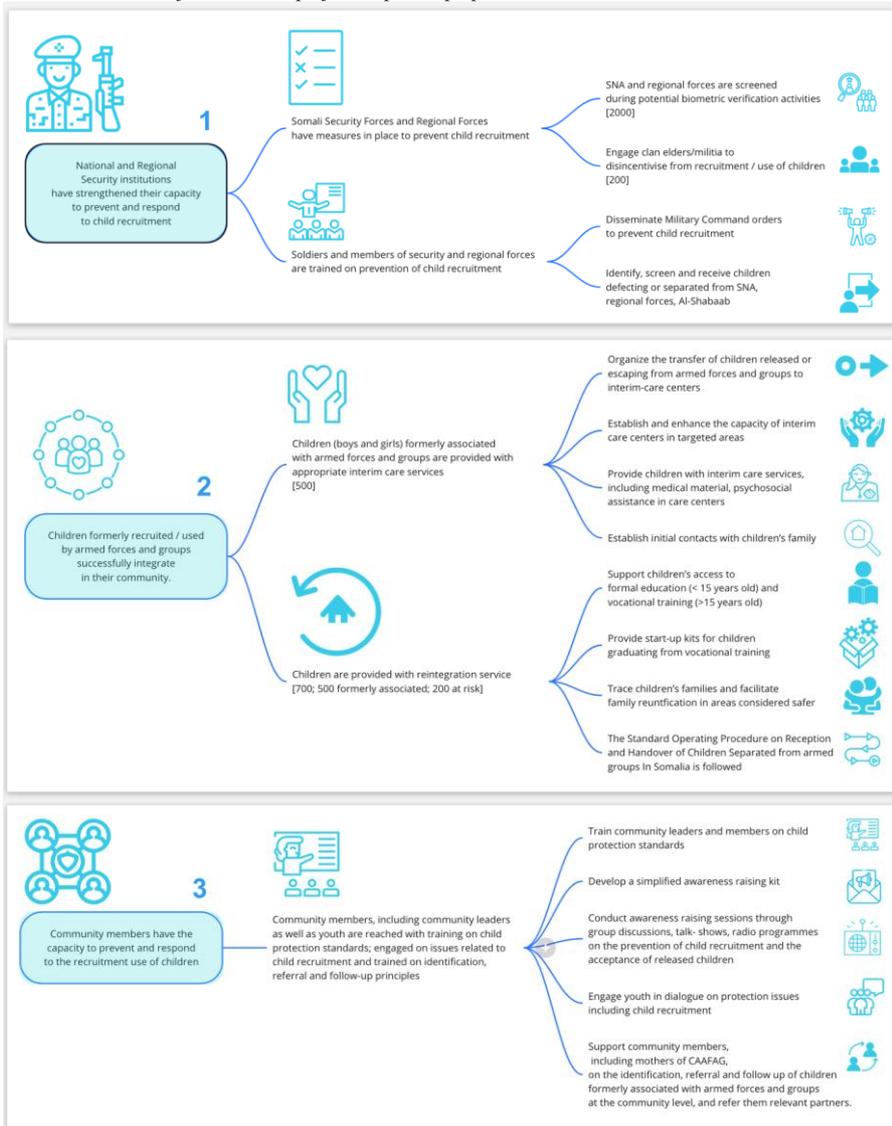
As we visited the centres, armed escorts entered the humanitarian compounds, both in Mogadishu and in Kismayo. This is a major concern, as humanitarian space should always remain a gun-free one (and especially in the context of CAAFAG).

As national and international personnel will hopefully visit more and more often the centres, options to guarantee safety, but also the sacrality of humanitarian space, should be set..

Project highlights

Project highlights

These are the stated objectives of the project, as per the proposal.



(Infographic produced by the evaluation. Available at <https://tinyurl.com/28v4njrv>)

Project achievements

Project achievements were documented in the project final report. **Stated achievements indicators have been reached** – and sometimes even **exceeded** (also thanks to a no cost-extension increasing programme duration). The programme:



Strengthened national capacity to prevent and respond to child recruitment through boosting **implementation of the action plan** to end child recruitment, with the set-up of **coordination forums** and meaningful **engagement with the SNA** to facilitate smooth release of AS children captured at battle. The meaningful engagement with key government institutions, the security organs and civil society during the last two years underlines continuity and sustainability of activities.



Successful community reintegration for CAAFAG, with only one report of recidivism



Elders, clan leaders and community leaders increased knowledge and understanding on child protection and prevention of recruitment which led to treatment of captured children as victims and an increase in referrals from community members to NGO partners.

Challenges during the implementation period.

Results were achieved overcoming considerable **challenges in the implementation period**. The major ones were:



Covid

The COVID pandemic hit Somalia as the project was ongoing. Partners invested in prevention measures. They were aware of potential impact on mental health. Activities could nevertheless continue; no major direct impact was reported. But Covid influenced:

- **the context:** partners noticed that closure of schools increased likelihood of recruitment of children. However, data and evidence to prove this point was not accessible.
- **the working environment:** the prevention measure, the shift to remote engagement – coupled with already existing security limitations – further decreased the interaction amongst project partners. In the view of implementing organizations, remote engagement fatigue affected connections with other project partners – limiting, for example experience sharing / learning.



Major partnership shifts (project oversight)

Responsibilities for co-delivery and government oversight of this programme were shifted from the Ministry of Defence to the Ministry of Internal Security. This required considerable investment in establishing new relationship: to maintain positive relations with the Ministry of Defence; to strengthen the partnership with the Somali National Army and with the Ministry of Internal Security (through informal advocacy, training, mentorship).



Implementing partners leaving the country (and partnership reassessment)

A project partner (INTERSOS) left the country due to systematic frauds which were deemed as “too dangerous to try to resolve”. [source: [The new humanitarian](#)]. As a stop-gap measure, children were transferred to another partners. But a coverage gap remained – still to be resolved. This change eventually led to a reassessment of project partnerships for the subsequent project. (→ Interconnectedness Momentum)



Increasing recruitment.

Recruitment continued to increase: “Rather than decreasing child recruitment, during the programme period child recruitment had increased by 15% at the end of 2021 and figures would indicate that recruitment will be maintained at unacceptably high levels. Recruitment with government forces is maintained at approximately 25% of the overall figures” [Final report]. Tackling root causes is not possible within the current setup. → [Looking at the programme with risk management lenses](#)

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What was learnt?

This evaluation happened long time since the end of the project. A new project is already designed and ongoing. Before launching into generating new findings, the evaluation checked: what did the project learn already, and how did it feed into further action? The evaluation could then 1) check if the existing findings were valid and relevant and 2) broaden the outlook and provide additional ideas and perspectives (using novel criteria).

Honest reflections, feeding into the next project

The following table gives credit to the programme management for their findings so far, as presented in their final report. Such findings were addressed in the subsequent project. Links are provided, to corroborate these findings with further ideas emerging from the evaluation.



Addressing root causes of recruitment

The programme, as currently structured is not preventing child recruitment [final report]. In the government-controlled area, the long-term programme is having an impact in preventing recruitment: policies, checks exist. But most recruitments now happen in Al Shabaab controlled area, where — according to a research commissioned by UNICEF - “children living in AS controlled territories have little choice in the matter. Forced conscription of children appears to be AS policy”

→ A risk management mindset, to build meaningful resilience.



Case management needs to be strengthened

“While the quality of the programme is high – assessed through only 1 verified case of recidivism in more than 5 years and multiple stories of change from children who have graduated the programme – documentation of case mgmt. processes is insufficient to provide literal evidence of impact. Case mgmt. processes must be professionalised and strengthened”. [Final report]

→ The children experience
The children experience

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More diversity of services is needed

“The programme does not sufficiently respond to latest research and thinking on adolescent development. There should be greater diversity of services to support well-being, peer to peer growth, skill development and guardianship.”

→ Ensure diversity of opportunities
Ensure diversity of opportunities

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Programme recognition in community

“The programme is insufficiently recognised in the community and could benefit from greater awareness within govt, community”.

→ Relations amongst local actors



Accountability to children

A needed shift for the programme is the development of youth accountability and decision support mechanisms.

→ Diversity, equity, inclusion
Diversity, equity, inclusion

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→ Resilience
Resilience

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How did learning happen, so far?

The **honest reflections** in the final report – and more in general, the learning feeding into the programme - were based on evidence from different sources as detailed below



Project/programme M&E:

The formal M&E system in place was oriented to bureaucratic reporting rather than learning. This meant that, in the practice, formal M&E systems had limited impact and use. They were more of an “overhead” rather than an asset for the programme. This is an important finding for the evaluation: M&E systems require considerable investment in time and resources, but they do not add value to the programme. They had rather used scarce staff time, limiting alternatives.



Data management systems

Diverse data management systems in use by UNICEF could be relevant for the programme.

- **The MRM** (monitoring and reporting mechanisms) is used to register reported and cross-checked violations. Multi-year data analysis was performed by the programme and helped to understand overall trends.
- **CPIMS+** [[link](#)] is an integrated child management database. The programme, the implementing partners are aware of the need for better case management. Yet there are challenges in using the CPIMS system, reported by implementing partners: it lacks specific sections on CAAFAG; and options to deal with the sensitivity of the issue. In the short term CPIMS is probably not going to be the best choice to capture child management data, but other stop-gap solutions could be put in place by the programme.
- **Protection service database:** the protection unit in Somalia is working on a service database, to display location and coverage of protection services, together with some basic indicators. The system is still being developed – so it could not be used to inform the project. But has great potential in showing the extent and the coverage of the services.



Informal reflections by UNICEF and partners (“honest reflection opportunities”)

Projects reports mentioned moments of “honest reflection” by programme staff. Their findings scattered amongst project reports and documents and were a rich source of learning by doing. However, beside this evaluation, there was no process to consolidate them. The existence of a culture of honest sharing is positive. The evaluation confirmed that partners were used to open discussions: challenges were seen an opportunity for betterment, not as something to hide.



Reflections by UNICEF and partners (organized events)

Partners had overall lamented lack of opportunities for sharing. Some formal sharing events had happened (for example, the annual planning meeting). Their impact in documenting and sharing learning, however, remained limited (the evaluation only traced some presentation, which, however, stopped at sharing outputs, rather than strategic ideas).



Informal learning / adjustment.

The programme evidently adapted and evolved. It improved its approaches, it adapted to sudden challenges (e.g., COVID, the continuously shifting scenario). But experiential learning. Capturing this type learning is always a major challenge, for any project. Yet tacit, informal learning is probably the richest one. The programme is realizing this and is now investing in researching the approach in use. → [Capturing models of intervention](#)



Research

Research was commissioned and it informed the programme. The research on drivers of recruitment was not formally released, but findings fed into strategic choices. Given the interest of these topics, finding avenues for popularization, and sharing of research findings - beyond management and across diverse audiences – should be explored.

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Observing how learning happened so far matters. How was evidence gathered? What processes were used / better suited for critical reflection? How could UNICEF and partners learn and adapt better? It emerged that **learning mostly happened despite the formal systems in use**. Programme staff expressed frustration about them. This calls for a **revision and reframing** of current practices for understanding context and change: from **being an administrative task to become a resource for the programme**.



The evaluation invested considerable efforts in finding and processing existing monitoring data in interactive dashboards. These efforts revealed very little in terms of analysis. But were telling about M&E challenges. Data were hard to find, and they were essentially designed to provide indicators to the project - rather than insights about change. This evident limitation is a major opportunity cost for the project. It calls for better M&E systems, more oriented to transformation, adaptation than reporting. This is why a companion report was produced.

Key learning

- **The programme achieved its objectives (but there is more to do).** As per final report, the programme achieved its objectives. But it also recognized that they are just making a dent in the overall issues. Honest reflections helped to identify new areas of action for the future of the programme.

- **The programme exhibited an informal reflection culture.** Learning, findings feeding in subsequent projects were honest and sound. The project did not shy away from challenges but addressed them constructively. This reflection culture should continue to be fostered.
- **The formal M&E approaches in use hinder rather than support evidence use.** The organizational M&E approach – and the M&E system set for this specific programme were mostly oriented to reporting to donors, upward. Their opportunity-cost affects learning and broader accountability.

Main findings

Why transformational criteria?

As anticipated in the inception report, the **evaluation findings are presented through transformational criteria**.

The **evaluation TORs were structured around OECD/DAC criteria**. But the evaluation of **transformative projects cannot be well served by them**. When addressing issues which have deep and complex roots – as this project does – it is important to have criteria able to respond to complexity. The most progressive evaluation approaches are gearing up to respond to this challenge: **overcoming the linear project mentality**, and looking at **systems, complexity, transformation**. This is also the ambition of this evaluation.

Limitations of OECD/DAC criteria in assessing systems and complexity are well known (and the recent revision of such criteria did not overcome them). They **are not fit for purpose when looking at conflict, advocacy, complexity, rights**: all topics at the core of this project! Making a dent in child recruitment involves working at the nexus of humanitarian, development, peacebuilding. It requires in depth knowledge of the context, and adaptiveness to a continuously shifting landscape. It demands to bring together stakeholders with very diverse worldviews and interests at stake. Contrasting child recruitment, fostering their reintegration requires deep transformation in society. **OECD/DAC criteria are essentially project-centric and oriented to the blueprint**. They do little to understand how the project drive transformation in shifting contexts where continuous adaptations are needed.

The criteria used are an **adaptation of the transformational criteria proposed by Michael Quinn Patton** (2020), [Evaluation Criteria for Evaluating transformation: Implications for the Coronavirus Pandemic and the Global Climate Emergency”, *American Journal of Evaluation* - Nov 2020. → [link](#)] Transformational criteria **incorporate the OECD/DAC concerns within them**, but they shift to a higher ground and perspective.

Finally, transformational criteria help to offer a **fresh outlook, a different perspective on projects**. Which is what an external evaluation should achieve.

Transformation fidelity

What meaningful change did the programme generate?



The extent to which the realities of transformational change initiatives match transformational aspirations and rhetoric.

- Ensure that what is called transformation constitutes transformation.
- Evaluate whether and how what is called transformational engagement constitutes a trajectory toward transformation.

Transformation fidelity is an ambitious criterion. It encompasses effectiveness, impact, relevance. It does not stop at asking ~~if a project~~ if a project achieved planned outcomes. It questions if the **change achieved fit the needs of CAAFAG children** and significantly transformed their lives. Were the lives of CAAFAG transformed? Is the system set to support reintegration serving this transformation?

The major transformational shifts UNICEF is addressing with its CAAFAG work are hard to appreciate within the timeframe of a short project. So, the evaluation looked at the project as a “**moment in time**” of a broader trajectory of change, with a programme rather than a project perspective



Transformation is best understood looking at the overall trajectory of change.

A decade ago, hardly any instrument re: children / CAAFAG rights existed. Such instruments are now in place. UNICEF and other committed stakeholders contributed to such policy changes and accompanied them with programmes on the ground. This project is a step along a much longer trajectory of change and need to be situated within it.



The importance to avoid projectization

Along the programme, UNICEF tried to avoid “project/donor creep” (for example, avoiding shifting goals and modus operandi as donor changed). This is choice worth emphasizing and praising – as too often the development of long-term programmes is disturbed by donor-driven requests and demands. Seemingly small request (e.g., “a quick baseline”) might weaken existing systems. They might deflect needed action on stronger programme-level tools - rather than supporting it. All these dynamics were quite evident in the setup of the following project, run in coordination with IOM. External M&E demands risked alienating partnerships and UNICEF had to work hard with partners to find suitable compromises. Donors should be always aware of the risk of projectization, and promote needed flexibility, adaptability to ensure overall coherence of programmes.



Documenting transformation.

The trajectory of change was not effectively documented. It could be inferred through project proposals and additional documents. But, overall, the programme lacked a timeline of key events and milestones - on which to also plot and explain the softer shifts it generated (awareness of children rights, changes in attitudes towards child combatants, improvement in coordination, etc). The programme also lacked a comprehensive theory of change.

Commented [DS1]: Almost all UNICEF’s project are guided by a theory of change. Perhaps what lacked was to consciously use this theory to document changes activities are bringing to children.

Levels of transformation

The programme has been undoubtedly, transformational, and at different levels – as highlighted here.



Country level: setting a protection architecture

At the national level – in the government-controlled areas -, it contributed to a fledging architecture of policies and mechanisms supporting CAAFAG children. Commitments are not hollow, and CAAFAG children are gaining more access to protection services. The programme, however, had no penetration in the Al Shabaab controlled area, where most recruitment is happening.



Implementing partners: capacities for support

How to best support CAAFAG children? The programme piloted options, across diverse partners. They had to “learn by doing” and were in the driving seat: technical capacity – specifically suited to the Somali context – was not available or deployable. Achievements varied, but ultimately what worked (and what did not) emerges. Promising approaches are being documented, for sharing. Capturing models of intervention



Communities: reconciliation, support.

Connection with and engagement of local actors improved. This is an essential component of the programme because 1) it helps to reach out children (including children living in AS controlled areas) to ensure that they can be enrolled in the programme; 2) it connects children with their carers, to support their reintegration process; 3) it will support long-term needs. The architecture of community support is informal, and it is slowly taking shape.



individual level: life changes.

The project deeply transformed the lives of the children reached. It has, in some cases, literally saved their lives (when, for example, combatant children could escape death penalty and be referred to a centre). Hundreds of children were supported and reintegrated in their communities. However how this happened, the details and dynamics of transformation are not clear. Only few “human stories” were shared. The programme lacks effective options to track and document impact on children – beyond broad indicators telling little about how change happen.

Commented [DS2]: I agree on this one. We are conducting a second series of studies on drivers of child recruitment looking at children’s experiences in the group, during and after reintegration.

Significant achievements and transformation

A linear narrative would not effectively capture the transformation generation by the project. Changes are many, diverse and the interact. They need to be seen within the broader picture. This is what a complexity map can do. What a complexity map is and why it matters will be explained better in the next chapter. But a few introductory notes about complexity and the use of mapping are now necessary.

Using complexity lenses

Complexity means that issues such as CAAFAG reintegration are wicked, hard to extricate: any action, any change links to diverse factors. Significant change requires awareness of them, and capacity to navigate and disentangle them. A main finding about “complex system framing” is that the programme / project did appreciate complexity, but this happened informally. Project stakeholders were aware of the intricacies, but the tools they used, the system they put in place were not capable to represent, track, share this complexity. This is not a surprise: most developmental and humanitarian programmes still lack such tools and systems.

Tools appreciating complexity are hard to read. Not everyone is familiar with them. But an evaluation with a transformational stance can (should!) have a role in breaking the habit of “linear narrations”. Can the evaluation be an opportunity to support project and programme stakeholders in thinking differently? Can it demonstrate, hands on, the value and the potential of different tools and approaches?

This evaluation is trying to “walk the talk” by sharing findings in novel way: to go beyond outcomes, to capture interlinkages. Only then the complexity of the intervention can be fully appreciated and shared. This is why this chapter findings are captured on an interactive maps of change.

How to navigate the system diagram

Reading an interactive map might look daunting, but it is a required effort to shift gear in thinking. Here are some tips on how to navigate it. If the whole map looks scary, you might access it from the links provided in the narrative that follows.



Click on the link! In the following, specific factors of change are highlighted, and a link is provided. If you click on it, you will access the complexity map, but only the factor of change and its immediate connections will be highlighted.



Expand the view! Do you want to see the whole map? On the right of the screen, you will find the focus control. By clicking on it you can clear, expand, contract the focus.



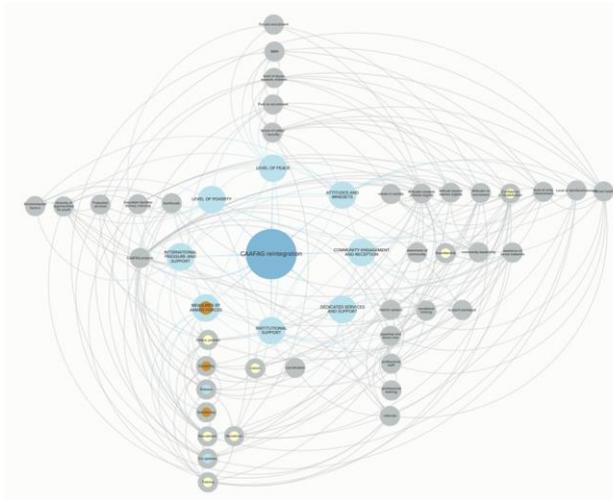
Hover on the dots. Looking at the whole map can be scary! But if you hover on any dot for a little while, you will just see its connections (beware: it might take a little time for the map to update on a slow connection!)



Click on the dots. If you click on a dot, you can also access information about it. It will appear to the left of your screen (if it does not, please click on the 3 vertical dots on the middle left)



Enjoy the navigation! Hopefully, once you gain confidence, you could just navigate the map, rather than reading the report. Navigating through the map opens new way of understanding, of thinking that I hope you will enjoy!



This is an interactive map of the factors at play for CAAFAG reintegration, as emerged from the evaluation.

It is accessible online → [here](#)

Once validated and revised, the map could become the basis for a proper “theory of change” for the programme.

Future projects could then define their “theory of action” based on this. All this is better explained in the next chapter, on → [Complex Systems Framing](#)

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How the map was generated, how can it be use.

The evaluation is piloting a novel ways to depict transformation: a complexity map. Please note that:

- **The CAAFAG system map is a major evaluation output.** The CAAFAG system map results from analysis of the available evidence: what factors are at play? How did they connect? No such map existed before: it is a first attempt to offer a visual representation of the different factors influencing CAAFAG rehabilitation, and of their interaction. The evaluation was, literally, a way to join the dots!
- **This map was built based on the evidence captured by the evaluation, and in discussion with partners.** Any dot, any linkages was added to the map because of input received during the evaluation. It is not an abstract exercise.
- **This map is just a starting point.** Factors of change might be rephrased, added, removed. Connections might be questioned, based on experience and available research. The map is meant to be just a “good enough conversation starter.
- **The map is showing factors, not actors.** Existing analysis by the project tend to have an actor perspective: what is the government doing? What is Al Shabaab positioning? This results in programme narratives contrasting the two – which, as the evaluation will observe, is reducing the room for manoeuvre. This map is designed to capture underlying factors, not positions. The same factor (e.g., educational facilities) can then have a positive or negative role, in context. This map can then better support innovative strategies and facilitate learning across diverse contexts.
- **The map is shoring factors, not activities.** Some “theories of change” mistakenly track project activities – rather than the underlying factors they act upon. Diverse activities might contribute to address the same factors (and this is then called “theory of action). This distinction will be better explained in the → companion, but it important to have it in mind.

Main areas of transformation

Recruitment, co-optation



The **recruitment of children** [↪ [link](#)] by the Somali National Army reduced. There are now mechanisms in place to avoid and sanction it [↪ [link](#)], and pressure and sanctions on this regard. Screenings [↪ [link](#)] happened throughout the programme, to the target established. The evaluation did not access to data to independently verify trends, but stakeholders from the MoD reported an increased compliance. Challenges remain re:

- **Recruitment by AS.** It is still the main challenge: children in controlled areas are still forcibly recruited. [↪ [Looking at the programme with risk management lenses](#)]
- **Recruitment by regional militias.** They are still harder to reach and advocate on.
- **Co-optation of children.** [↪ [link](#)] Children might not be recruited formally, but still have engagement at the side of the army /militia (children living close to military structures, for example, might be engaging in chores – including of a military nature). [This co-optation might

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Commented [DS3]: Case of ‘askari maroodi’- elephant soldiers: children living and depending on military camps for survival

be “lighter” than actual recruitment, yet harder to deal with, as it happens in a grey area. Co-optation might have various forms, also involving girls (targeted with GBW; or employed in military chores such as transportation of armoury, being less likely to be checked).

Release of children in the support system



Release of children [↗ link] in the system has been a major challenge for the programme, until recently. Having set the normative framework, it was still hard to “get the children”. This was a main advocacy point in the early years of the programme. In the project period, things started to shift. **Release is steadily increasing.** Policies are in place [↗ link], awareness raised (including because of **training** [↗ link]), and, crucially, mutual trust and **confidence in the programme increased** [↗ link]. Collaboration, coordination contributing to release: MoIS, is referring through better **liaison** [↗ link] at the local level. These are extremely important achievements. Challenges remain re:

- **Managing the threat of recidivism** [↗ link]. Gained trust can be undermined, any moment, by recidivism. One case was reported during the project, and was a major challenge. Hence the importance of programme quality, of strong coordination with national and local stakeholders. And, of further investment in explaining the value of the programme, to mitigate the zero tolerance towards recidivism. Advocacy in this direction should be informed by consolidated evidence on benefits of reintegration (beyond numbers), now lacking.
- **Length, reliance of the release process.** Children at risk should be swiftly referred to UNICEF. There should be no interrogation / imprisonment. But, reportedly, not always children are released after 72 hours as per Operating Procedures of the National Army. More at-risk children (captured in active combat) could remain in detention centres. This is a concern. *Guidelines for the individual assessment of children released from Al Shabaab in Somalia* are being negotiated. Including coordinated mechanisms for monitoring release might contribute to stronger mutual accountability and compliance.
- **No referral by Al Shabaab.** There is no referral from Al-Shabaab. The programme has no channel for advocacy or collaboration with the group. Yet high-risk children referred to the programme were combatants in Al Shabaab forces captured during operations by the SNA, or children at risk of recruitment by AS, referred through community informants.

Dedicated services for children, access to livelihoods



The programme is **helping children to regain self-confidence and autonomy** with an array of services: interim centres [↗ link], vocational training. **Economic /livelihood assistance** [↗ link] blend with **mental health** [↗ link] and **social support**. All this transformed the lives of children, who now live in safer communities on their own means.

Approaches in use to support lives and livelihoods of children improved. In the early stages of the programme, the main worry was to get → ~~Release of children in the support system~~ **Release of children in the support system** mechanisms in place. It could then shift towards quality support: “Now that we got the children, what is the best way to deal with them?”. Diverse partners tested different approaches, with uneven results (lack of practices at a global scale adaptable to Somalia was mentioned as a challenge). This purported the need for consolidating and sharing the best emerging options, building on experience, on feedback received from donors and UNICEF technical staff. Documentation and harvesting of practice are now happening [↗ ~~The emerging approach: the 5 pillars~~ **The emerging approach: the 5 pillars**]. Challenges remain re:

- **Documentation of children achievements and pathways.** How exactly transformation happen, what are the stories of change of the children is still little documented. First hand visits happened in the Elman and INTERSOM centres during the evaluation. Children were happy of their achievements, confident in the future. The evaluation could not access children phased out of the programme, neither consolidated evidence: what pathways do children follow? [↗ ~~The children experience: complex and diverse. How to best capture it?~~ **The children experience: complex and diverse. How to best capture it?**]
- **Programme coverage.** Partnership changes created coverage gaps: areas previously served have been discontinued. New projects are now filling the gap. The coverage, however, remain patchy, and not all regions under government control are covered.
- **Technical support:** access to centres by national and international UNICEF staff was challenging. This reduced the accompaniment to partners. Partners- and children! - are eager to have international support and presence. Options to increase it should be considered.

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- **Challenges in placements.** The drawback of fast reintegration were challenges in finding placements for children graduated from centres. This calls for even more investment in in fostering diverse options for diverse children → [Diversity of CAAFAG children](#). ~~Diversity of CAAFAG children~~.
- **Reaching children in AS controlled areas.** There are obviously no centres / services in AS controlled areas.

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Institutional architecture and support



The programme is shaping quite a complex architecture, and there are visible achievements. **The defence side is increasingly streamlined.** Roles, responsibilities, coordination amongst MoD, SNA, MoIS are overall improving (despite changes in partnerships during the project). Capacity to liaise [[link](#)] with local institutions and communities is also growing. Initial, **promising examples of an architecture for overseeing successive rehabilitation steps** are emerging. For example: the Martial Court of Putland established a children’s desk, building on juvenile justice partnerships with the Ministry of Justice. An indication of the key role that the Justice actors might have in the institutional architecture. Challenges remain re:

- **Further transformation is still needed.** From release onwards, the rehabilitation process is taken in charge by international / implementing organizations. There is still limited supervision and engagement by state authorities. The next required step is transitioning towards oversight of reintegration. Pathways protocols for this are still being set, but this is early stages. Further work with line ministries – e.g., Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Women and Human rights will be needed – and this will also involve capacity support.
- **There are no mechanisms involving Al Shabaab.** No institutions linked with Al Shabaab groups were reached / involved throughout the programme. Platforms for negotiation do not exist. Given that Al Shabaab is still the major recruiter of children, this disconnect is a concern. → [The risk of taking one side](#)~~The risk of taking one side~~
- **Coordination amongst actors:** Coordination [[link](#)] and mutual accountability amongst actors are key for a strong institutional architecture: for liaison, for referrals, to create a viable ecosystem of services. The national level coordination is not yet matched by an adequately strong operational one. The section →
- ~~Interconnectedness Momentum~~
- ~~Intereconnectedness Momentum~~ will provide more insights about relations, coordination within the architecture.

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Community engagement in reintegration



Community leadership – sensitized by the project – had an increasing role in protection / prevention of recruitment. In the practice this strengthened **liaison efforts** [[link](#)] – to bring children to safety with support of the MoIS. It also supported their **reintegration**: leaders are acting as guarantee for **guardianship** [[link](#)]. An increasing level of cooperation amongst local actors (e.g., government department, community elders, religious leaders, implementing partner) was also reported.

It was **quite hard to assess this component of the programme.** Things are happening, transformation was achieved (children reach centres, and they are supported in the community). But how? Whilst the programme is now documenting the work in the centres, very little exist to show community-level action. There are of course sensitivities (referral of children, for example, requires intelligence and safe networks). But, overall, the **community work remains a “black box”**: this misses on the opportunity to understand what approaches seem to work better, how community work can be best structured. The programme should set to “open the black box” of community work. [[Relations amongst local actors](#)~~Relations amongst local actors~~]

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Attitudes, perceptions



When building the system map, the evaluation pinpointed many attitudinal shifts achieved by the programme. It is well known that achieving real change requires a social norms change. Yet, in the practice, shifts in perceptions were under reported by the programme, despite being the backbone of achievements. The main challenge with attitudinal shifts is that they mostly happened within government-controlled area: it is much harder for the programme to reach and influence Al Shabaab controlled territories.

- **Who is a child?** [[link](#)] For federal government law adulthood is at 18. But 15-year-old children are already likely to considered adults. They could be recruited. They can be held

responsible for their choice and action. Changing these perceptions to reclaim childhood required persuasion and advocacy: at the institutional and at the personal level. The Federal Government is now (since 2015) a signatory on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Institutions set practices to protect minors. And understanding of stakeholders, shifted.

- **From abusers to victims.** Linked to the above, there was a shift away from prosecution and persecution of children. Even if children enrolled in the army, even if they were combatant, they should be considered victims, deserving protection and support. Children are now more likely to be released [[→ Release of children in the support system](#)~~Release of children in the support system~~]. And because of this shift, children previously sentenced to death or imprisonment can now enter diversion programmes. There are still some challenges in fully realize this shift, (release of children might consequently be delayed). Ideally this perception should further progress: from “victims” to survivors: maintaining the right of protection but shifting from passive to an active child’s role.
- **From enemies to community.** Reintegration in communities require mutual trust. Communities, and their leaders [[👉 link](#)] must trust the children, and the process of reintegration. This trust was groomed with training and sensitization, as well as with engagement in loose coordination mechanisms. Messages were shared with communities to raise awareness [[👉 link](#)] (but it is hard to gauge their actual effectiveness) Also children should trust the community! [[👉 link](#)]. It was initially not easy for them (being groomed and radicalized in believing that they were “enemies”). Mutual trust building was fostered by the positive experience of the programme.
- **Confidence in rehabilitation process** [[👉 link](#)] Confidence in rehabilitation certainly increased (despite a case of recidivism). It was gained slowly over time and was essential to step up [→ Release of children in the support system](#)~~Release of children in the support system~~. But it is still frail. It needs to be continuously confirmed, **nurtured with evidence**. UNICEF management understands events of recidivism could crush this trust and be a catastrophic event for the programme. Could stakeholders appreciate that recidivism – provided it is very limited - is a risk worth taking, given the overall benefits of reintegrated children for society? Can M&E help to support stronger advocacy in this respect?
- **The space for shifting attitudes in AS-controlled territory is minimal.** It is still very hard to reach children at risk of recruitment and influence attitudes to recruitment [[👉 link](#)].

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Transformational potential of children

Children are transformed

Children in centre undergo transformation. Yet **transformation might go unnoticed**, being, apparently, minor. A small example: children in Kismayo explained how much they like to play football now. Sounds “normal”, right? But when asked “*Did you play it before?*” a child answered “*I did not know football. We do not know football in my community*”. Which tells loads about the isolation he lived in. “*Children from my place do not play*”. Getting to an environment where to enjoy being a child is an incredible transformation, yet it might look as life as normal to outsider. **Capacity to show transformation from the perspective of the children** will be key, to fully appreciate its value, the effort and commitment of implementing organizations, its implications; to build understanding and solidarity. **But M&E of the project is not yet fit for this challenge.**



I was aggressive.

The personal transformation children underwent is stunning. At the end of the meeting with a tailoring class in Kismayo a child raised his hand. “I was very aggressive” he said. I understood I should not be, I am better now”. What major shifts in such a small sentence, given that “male CAAFAG may spend all or part of their formative developmental years within a culture that promotes masculine expectations of violence, power and competitiveness, and that rejects weakness or expression of emotions, and deprives them of protection and nurture”. [[👉 link](#)] He worked on his behaviour. He was not ashamed to reveal it. In a society where toxic masculinity is strong, a voice sharing self-awareness and desire to change is a powerful one.

Transformed children have the potential to transform society

When interacting with children, it was evident that they have an **immense, still untapped potential to change the community they now live in**. They were sponges, quick and keen in **absorbing new ideas, new skills, new habits, new ways of life**. They were keen to practice them. And their enthusiasm was contagious. **Children can**

then become formidable agents of change in the community they live in. This will be further discussed re: → Resilience and → Targeting challenges

How are children chosen to be part of the programme? There are several issues to be aware of, when looking at targeting challenges. The main two are 1) Children experienced different levels of exposure to risk and abuse. And 2) in the context of Somalia, where services and opportunities for children are limited, a quality programme might be an attractive resource for all. The interplay of them creates significant targeting challenges, that the programme is addressing.



Accounting for different risk levels in the selection process.

Exposure to risk varies. The programme covers a broad spectrum of children, from “former combatants” to “children at risk of conscription” (and different levels of risk might also be accompanied by different levels of abuses experienced). It is straightforward that former combatants should be enrolled in the programme. But, at the bottom end of the spectrum, it becomes hard to distinguish a low-risk child from a disadvantaged one.

- **Improvement in getting the high-risk children.** The high risk / exposure children are of course a priority for the programme. Such children are referred to the programme by armed forces or groups (from their screenings or because children were captured in operations). It was very hard to get referrals at the inception, but the situation positively changed → Release
- **The blurred low-end.** “this is the challenging part: ensuring that the partner have good selection processes process to identify the children associated with armed groups, rather than- for example - just generic IDPs” Attempts to discuss “criteria” by successive projects made evident that criteria are not enough to understand if low-risk children should be supported by the programme. Assessment is mostly done by selection committees – with representation of government at local actors. They tend to operate quite informally, and it is not always easy to track adequately the rationale for the selection process. What could be the middle ground in between set criteria and loose discussions?
- **Selection process.** The importance of a good selection process (and the existing challenges for accountability) have already been presented re: community engagement (→ Selection of children
- **Level of risk/abuse is hard to assess. Yet it matters.** Checking the level of exposure to abuse and risk of CAAFAG is difficult. Keeping risk profiles would be sensitive (hence requiring safe M&E mechanisms and confidentiality measured). And exposure to risk is hard to assess in the first place! Abuse can often be hidden, even unlikely to surface (think, for example, about boys experiencing GBV, a society taboo). However, assessing – at least broadly! – risk amongst a cohort of children, would matter for accountability, for improving the effectiveness of interventions, to strengthen advocacy efforts to, of course, to better reach most at-risk children.



Avoiding specific targeting of sensitive groups

The programme is aware that catering from former fighters – mainly AS – might create resentment in the community. Why are former fighters “awarded” with opportunities lacking in the community? As suggested by MHPSS in CAAFAG guidelines “programming must be careful to avoid specific targeting of sensitive groups, such as CAAFAG or survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, in line with the MHPSS core principle of ‘do no harm’. Specific targeting can result in increased societal stigma and further discrimination and exclusion of CAAFAG in communities, placing CAAFAG at risk of further harm, or it may reinforce divisions within a community. Specific targeting also runs the risk of causing inequities in service delivery where all children and families may have been affected by conflict”. Within the programme 20% of children should be vulnerable children from the host community.

- **What is the actual mix?** There were no disaggregated data to gauge the actual mix achieved in programmes, or information about selection criteria of community children.
- **Is diversity of circumstances calling for different packages?** In line with the discussion on tailoring, the programme should check: should packages for CAAFAG and host community children differ? If so, in what respect? And how to ensure that host children do not just get a “vocational training”, but a package that also make them actors of positive transformation and stronger reintegration? It is at this juncture that the programme might learn from peacebuilding approaches.
- **Fluid referrals.** The creation of a supportive ecosystem of referrals and support might ensure the needed fluidity of services: for CAAFAG children to transition to community services. And for highly vulnerable children to be selected as part of the reintegration programme when it would most beneficial for them.

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MHPSS programming do's	MHPSS programming don'ts
Do work towards broad support and advocacy that promotes inclusion of all children and community members.	Don't specifically target sensitive groups through service delivery that excludes other children, or through programming that names or identifies sensitive groups.
Do provide MHPSS services equitably to all vulnerable children in affected communities.	Don't provide MHPSS services to former CAAFAG only and ignore children at risk of recruitment in conflict-affected situations.
Do implement additional approaches, interventions and steps to adequately recognize and mobilize MHPSS resources for CAAFAG in conflict-affected environments, and meet their needs through strengthening structures and referral resources that benefit the community at large.	Don't create divisions in access to specialized services that exclude children other than CAAFAG who are in need of referral.
Do monitor MHPSS programmes and improve non-targeted approach if CAAFAG become stigmatized through receiving services.	Don't provide MHPSS services in a way that makes the community resent service provision to CAAFAG, or in a way that the community may perceive as rewarding perpetrators of violence.

From: Resource Package: Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in CAAFAG Programmes [[link](#)]

Getting the right mix of children remains a challenge. Some worry that the programme is still struggling to reach high risk/exposure children (but recognise that things are improving). Challenge in recruiting the "right" children could be however mitigated by a better customized and tailored assistance, balancing with effectiveness (serving more low-risk children with the same resources) what is lost with targeting. This is what seems to have happened looking at the indicators of the project. The push, however, should continuously be to refine targeting, and reaching the children in most distress.

Gender issues and perspectives. Targeting challenges

How are children chosen to be part of the programme? There are several issues to be aware of, when looking at targeting challenges. The main two are 1) Children experienced different levels of exposure to risk and abuse. And 2) in the context of Somalia, where services and opportunities for children are limited, a quality programme might be an attractive resource for all. The interplay of them creates significant targeting challenges, that the programme is addressing.



Accounting for different risk levels in the selection process.

Exposure to risk varies. The programme covers a broad spectrum of children, from "former combatants" to "children at risk of conscription" (and different levels of risk might also be accompanied by different levels of abuses experienced). It is straightforward that former combatants should be enrolled in the programme. But, at the bottom end of the spectrum, it becomes hard to distinguish a low-risk child from a disadvantaged one.

- **Improvement in getting the high-risk children.** The high risk / exposure children are of course a priority for the programme. Such children are referred to the programme by armed forces or groups (from their screenings or because children were captured in operations). It was very hard to get referrals at the inception, but the situation positively changed → Release
- **The blurred low end.** *"this is the challenging part: ensuring that the partner have good selection processes process to identify the children associated with armed groups, rather than for example just generic IDPs"* Attempts to discuss "criteria" by successive projects made evident that criteria are not enough to understand if low-risk children should be supported by the programme. Assessment is mostly done by selection committees — with representation of government or local actors. They tend to operate quite informally, and it is not always easy to track adequately the rationale for the selection process. What could be the middle ground in between set criteria and loose discussions?
- **Selection process.** The importance of a good selection process (and the existing challenges for accountability) have already been presented re: community engagement [→ Selection of children
-]
- **Level of risk/abuse is hard to assess. Yet it matters.** Checking the level of exposure to abuse and risk of CAAFAG is difficult. Keeping risk profiles would be sensitive (hence requiring safe M&E mechanisms and confidentiality measured). And exposure to risk is hard to assess in the first place! Abuse can often be hidden, even unlikely to surface (think, for example, about boys experiencing GBV, a society taboo). However, assessing — at least broadly! — risk amongst a cohort of children, would matter for accountability, for improving the effectiveness of interventions, to strengthen advocacy efforts to, of course, to better reach most at risk children.



Avoiding specific targeting of sensitive groups

The programme is aware that catering from former fighters — mainly AS — might create resentment in the community. Why are former fighters “awarded” with opportunities lacking in the community? As suggested by MHPSS in CAAFAG guidelines “programming must be careful to avoid specific targeting of sensitive groups, such as CAAFAG or survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, in line with the MHPSS core principle of ‘do no harm’. Specific targeting can result in increased societal stigma and further discrimination and exclusion of CAAFAG in communities, placing CAAFAG at risk of further harm, or it may reinforce divisions within a community. Specific targeting also runs the risk of causing inequities in service delivery where all children and families may have been affected by conflict”. Within the programme 20% of children should be vulnerable children from the host community.

- **What is the actual mix?** There were no disaggregated data to gauge the actual mix achieved in programmes, or information about selection criteria of community children.
- **Is diversity of circumstances calling for different packages?** In line with the discussion on tailoring, the programme should check: should packages for CAAFAG and host community children differ? If so, in what respect? And how to ensure that host children do not just get a “vocational training”, but a package that also make them actors of positive transformation and stronger reintegration? It is at this juncture that the programme might learn from peacebuilding approaches.
- **Fluid referrals.** The creation of a supportive ecosystem of referrals and support might ensure the needed fluidity of services: for CAAFAG children to transition to community services. And for highly vulnerable children to be selected as part of the reintegration programme when it would most beneficial for them.

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Gender issues and perspectives:

Tapping into the transformational potential of children would require a shift in thinking. **Now children integration tends to be “passive”**: children receive training and support to be able to fit in their community. It is mainly about supporting them with **conventional livelihoods** (e.g., plumbing, tailoring).

Could integration be more transformative? Could children become a vehicle for new, needed ideas to actively improve communities? Can children become **agents of positive change** in the communities reintegrating them? Thinking of children as agents of change could suggest avenues to **spread the benefits of the project more broadly**. And it could be a way, for a project sitting at the core of the → **centre of the nexuseentre of the nexus**, to unleash its **peace building potential** as well as its **developmental** one.

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Transformative recreational activities

Whilst livelihood options offered tended to be standard (mechanics, plumbers, tailors, electricians, mobile phone repairers...) recreational ones have been more creative in Mogadishu. **Surfing, yoga, chess** were proposed as part of the package, to link recreation to the development of mental and emotional skills, in line with cutting edge approaches. This transformational use of sport and recreational activities is currently being documented as part of the programmatic approach [→ The emerging approach: the 5 pillars]

Here are some ideas on how to do so:



Innovative vocational training options

Vocational training now proposed quite standard activities (e.g., tailoring, plumbing...). Could more diverse professional skills be proposed? → The eco-power: CAAFAG vs. environmental concerns could offer many new ideas and opportunities. They call for new “climate jobs” of for adaptation of existing ones. Conventional livelihoods could incorporate environmentally sound options for saving energy, reducing waste, using locally available natural products... (As a little example: the dyeing workshop only used chemical products with no mention of traditional dyes).

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More diverse recreational and sport activities,

The potential of sport and cultural activities to bring people together is well known. If new sports, activities are introduced, children might help spreading them, broadening opportunities and choice for all. Diversity of recreational activities helps to open minds: they have different rules and challenges, they value different abilities and skillsets. Open hours at the centres, partnership with local institutions to use facilities or venues can facilitate inclusion. New sports or cultural activities might also become a livelihood or voluntary activity (as sport instructor / trainer) Elman started to pilot this, for example by teaching surfing, yoga, chess. INTERSOM is not yet offering much choice of recreational activities: it operates with smaller premises and in a more remote location, but it is keen to do so, and might need support.



Actions, events in the community

There is no lack of opportunities for children to improve the communities where they now live in! Could children, for example, clean public or abandoned spaces and beautify them? In doing so, they would show their desire to “give back” to their communities. And they could be sensitized to environmental issues (and sensitize their host community)



Role modelling?

It has been suggested (in the project final report) that “youth and their parents can see alternative pathways for themselves and build a sense of hope ... Given the ‘instrumentalization’ of youth in the war, young people grow up within a militarised atmosphere where role models are often older arms carrying soldiers. It is critical, to create a new model that will allow youth to imagine different futures”. There might be sensitivities of course about this to consider, and children should be protected by potential backlash. But can children be a living example that it is possible to drop the guns, change beliefs and invest in peace? This would have an immense transformational value. For this to happen, investment in self-assertiveness, in capacity to communicate, should become part of the children’s curricula. (consider for example the fantastic potential of approaches as the “theatre of the oppressed” in sharing stories of transformation).

Key learning

- **Continue having a programmatic perspective (avoid projectization).** Management avoided projectization. It was not easy! Donors should be aware of their demands impact on longer term approaches.
- **Transformation was achieved, at diverse levels.** Specific challenges and opportunities were reported in the chapter.
- **Children have still untapped potential for transformation.** Transformation in communities could be led by transformed children. They have an untapped potential to carry new ideas, break new ground. For this to happen the programme should invest more in innovative activities, and in supporting capacity of children to communicate and engage with their community.

Complex Systems Framing

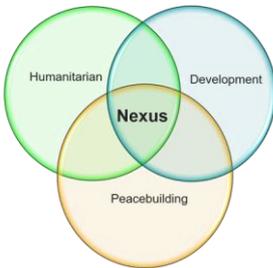
Is the programme “thinking complexity”?



Assess systems transformation using systems thinking principles and complexity concepts.

- Ensure that transforming systems is the transformational focus.
- Apply complex systems understandings, concepts, and frameworks in evaluating transformation.

Transformative programmes need adequate frameworks to guide, understand, evaluate transformation - frameworks acknowledging complexity. Complexity does not mean “complicated”. Complexity is a way of thinking suited to wicked, intractable problems where many factors interplay and interconnect. Complex thinking helps to understand how these factors interrelate. And, in doing so, it helps to act better, adapting to a continuously shifting context.



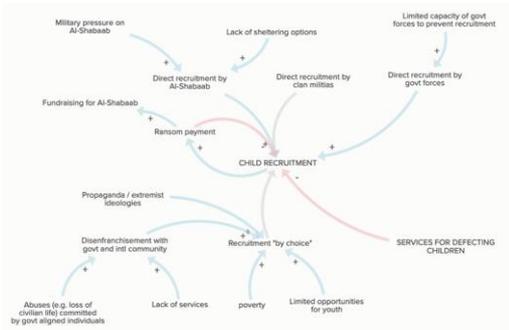
Complexity is intrinsic to the programme, given that it sits at the **centre of the nexus**. The programme must juggle:

- Humanitarian: responding to challenges raising from conflict, within a complex crisis threatening the lives of CAAFAG.
- Developmental: it promotes in long-term solutions, investing in livelihoods, capacity building, institutional strengthening
- Peacebuilding: it deals with tensions existing in societies; it equips children and their communities with attitudes and behaviours, networks to overcome exclusion, stigma, disenfranchisement, escalation of conflict.

Awareness that the programme is at the core of the nexus might help in strengthen engagement and coordination with other actors. And might help the programme to talk the “different languages” they might speak.

Did the programme acknowledge complexity? In the practice, in its strategies the **programme embraced complexity**: it acknowledged and dealt with the many factors affecting recruitment and rehabilitation – as evident in the previous chapter map, describing → **Significant achievements** ~~Signifeant achievements~~. The stakeholders interviewed always exhibited a complex understanding of reality. And the programme also invested in research to investigate specific aspects of this complexity (e.g., the research on drivers of recruitment).

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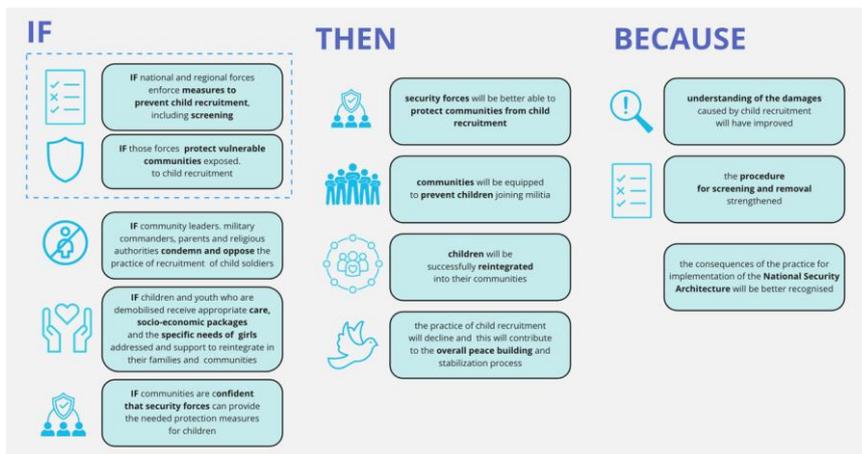
Interaction with project stakeholders demonstrated appreciation of complexity. Occasionally it was documented. This is an interactive visualization of factors leading to recruitment, based on the narrative of the CAAFAG project proposal (which, in turn, was built on research findings). When visualizing the narrative, complexity starts to emerge. <https://kumu.io/silva/child-recruitment>

Most often, however, the complexity of the project was not documented. Capturing it in useful formats was a painstaking analytical work for the evaluation.

The understanding of complexity largely **remained implicit**. it was not captured or shared in formats suited for tracking change, for learning, to deepen accountability. **Monitoring and evaluation systems in place hindered – rather than promote – systems thinking**. This was a major finding, and it **deeply resonated with the experience of programme management**. The programme was very aware of its limitation in portraying the context of change, and the depth of change achieved. Hence the choice to dwell into this finding and accompany this evaluation with → **practical ideas for a better M&E framework**.

The programme “theory of change”: fit for purpose?

When presenting transformations, the previous chapter already highlighted the need for a better “theory of change” (and draw a systemic maps putting together factors of change). But what was the actual theory of change of the programme? This is it, redesigned for readability [[Online version here](#)]



A Theory of Change is **the master tool to understand how a programme thinks about change**: how is change expected to happen, in context? The evaluation knows that **diverse understandings of “theory of change”** exist. Theories of Change were born to overcome the limitation of simplistic, linear chains, and to acknowledge the complexity of change. Yet many remained simply “[logframes on steroids](#)”. A proper theory of change identifies **drivers of change**. It shows the **interlinkages** amongst them and questions assumptions. As it does so, it acknowledges that change will be driven by different actors, with different perspectives and worldviews. Theories of change are then accompanied by **Theories of Action** explaining which factors a project will deal with, how.

ADD CARTOON ON THEORY OF CHANGE FROM COMPANION RESOURCE

A theory of change is a systemic approach that captures the key dynamics of change. What factors matters? How can they drive or hinder change? How do they interrelate? Based on this understanding, it is then possible to define “theories of action”: pinpointing what such dynamics a programme should try to address and how – always being aware of the broader picture. A theory of change is the underlying understanding that change actors share about how change can happen, and, as such, it should not differ across projects. It is an understanding evolved with research, with experience, checked with evidence. The same “theory of change” can be then the basis for different theories of action.

When looking at the existing project “theory of change” with this understanding, it emerges that:



Areas of change are not sufficiently unpacked

The “theory of change” identifies broad areas of change. But it does not sufficiently unpack them, up to the point where they are vivid, tangible, and actionable.



Lack of interrelations

The theory of change cluster areas of change under the headings “IF, THEN, BECAUSE”, but fails to track the linkages amongst them. A good theory of change captures “complexity”. This means that linkages are many, interrelated, non-linear.



The theory of change conflates the theory of action.

The theory of change overlapped with the theory of action.



It was driven by stated project outcomes (and it should be the other way round)

A theory of change should capture the understanding of “how change happens” as it emerges from experience, evidence, learning, research. It maps the terrain. A theory of change should not change within the same programme (but if should, of course, evolve!). It is the theory of action (as the name says!) to then chart different options for actions! Comparing the “theories of change” of different projects within the programme, revealed substantial differences: it was evident that the theory of change was just a way to formulate project outcomes, not a tool to build coherence across diverse projects.



The “theory of change” remained a bureaucratic fulfilment

There is no evidence that the theory of change was used as a tool for reflection and action. And it did not help programme actors to deepen and share learning.

IF we can build community acceptance for youth formerly associated with AS; AND
IF we can improve community perceptions of youth in the community; AND
IF we can build the mental health and resilience of youth formerly associated with AS and marginalized community youth
BY strengthening youth’s sense of purpose, building strong social networks, and contributing to local community initiatives.

THEN youth formerly associated with AS will effectively reintegrate, societal motivations to join AS will deteriorate for youth in the community, and communities will be more responsive to the needs of youth

BECAUSE there will be goodwill on part of the community, and both marginalized community youth and youth formerly associated with AS will have the skill sets to positively contribute to the community.

The IOM/UNICEF theory of change

This is the “theory of change” of the current programme, run by UNICEF and IOM.

Note how different it is from the previous one! It is then evident that “theories of change” are not evolving understanding of how change happens (evidence and experience based)

If this was the case, diverse programmes would build on the same, coherent, underlying reference. Theories of change, as demanded now in proposals, are rather just another way to frame programmatic choices.

Why such insistence on the weakness of the existing theory of change (and more in general, with the approaches to M&E it reveals?). Because it matters. Because, if they are not fit for purpose, they affect action for change. The weakness of the theory of change and of linked M&E is not a “fault” of the project. It is **largely determined by the overall organizational culture**, by the tools and processes prioritized by UNICEF and donors. A strong reflection on approaches to look at change is necessary and needs to be a bold one.

A good “theory of change” just an academic requirement: it can really impact on the quality of change strategies, of learning, of accountability. A stronger theory of change would help to:



Harvest knowledge, see the full picture.

Programme stakeholders have deeper, articulated understanding. Knowledge is valuable and not capturing it effectively is a loss for a programme! Also, stakeholders have diverse experiences and perspectives. They tap into diverse evidence and research. They can see different parts of the puzzle. It is only by bringing all this knowledge together that the fuller picture can be appreciated.



Avoid the risk of knowledge loss:

Staff turnover can result in major knowledge and vision loss, with major consequences for the operations and the strategic direction of a programme.



Challenge assumptions

A good theory of change rests on capacity to question assumptions. Which linkages can we confidently assume? Where is more research needed? A theory of change can reveal assumptions, blind spots and – hence – strengthen programmes. The programme has invested on research. Embedding it into the theory of change could make it more practical and actionable.



Improve adaptiveness (and retains accountability)

It is increasingly understood that programmes require adaptiveness. Even more so a programme like this one, seeking novel options for change in a complex setup. A theory of change helps to map avenues, alternatives. And yet, it ensures a coherent vision, strengthening accountability. Accountability is then not just about “working as per plan” but “improving action as per possibilities”. Which is a model of accountability much more fit-for-purpose for the programme.



Mapping the terrain helps to build stronger strategies.

Linked to the above, a theory of change is a strategic tool, ensuring coherence amongst projects.



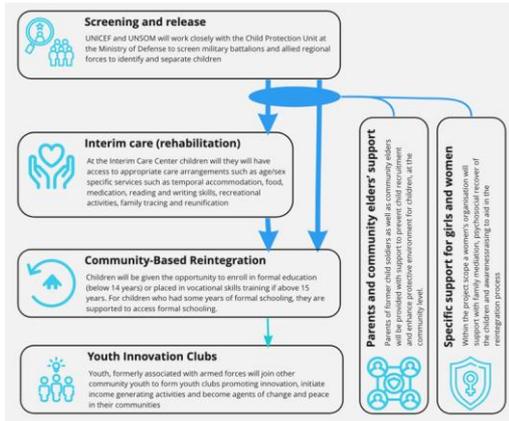
Better share learning

If determinants of change are spelled out, participants get to a stronger shared understanding. They have a better common “game board” on which to share their preferred avenue of change, discuss assumption, propose alternatives.

The children experience: complex and diverse. How to best capture it?

How is the programme framing the children experience?

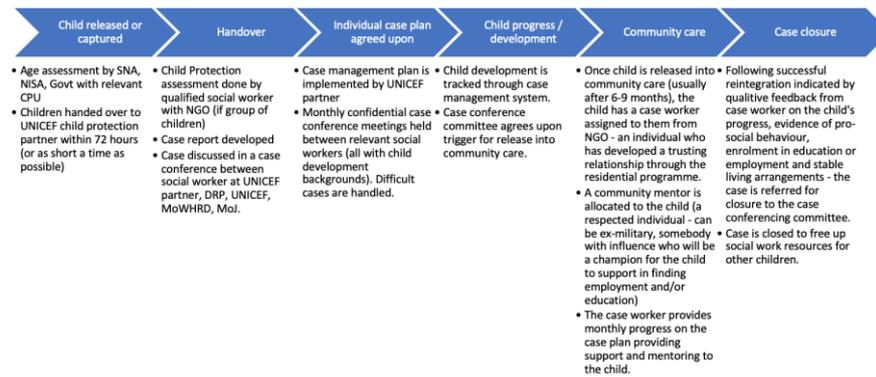
This is the sequence how activities for reintegration of children are outlined in the programme.



The programme is trying to conceptualize the child reintegration path.

To the left: an outline of the main interventions in place to support the children, as per the proposal (infographic by the evaluation)

Below: the reintegration flow chart as documented in 2022 (internal document)



Work on the children pathway was done, and the pathway evolved. But further work is needed, to capture diversity of experiences along it (and set tailored assistance). Having a clear pathway matters to:

- be a **guidance for implementation**.
- be an **advocacy / discussion tool**, supporting better and more structured demands.
- set the most adequate **institutional architecture around it**.
- support better **coordination** of institutional and community actors, and the setup of protocols, guidelines.
- clarify roles and responsibilities, strengthen **mutual accountability** amongst programme stakeholders.
- support **oversight and monitoring**.

The following are suggestions to further improve it, based on evidence about children experience.



Children enter the programme in different ways.

Children are **entering** the programme through different avenues, not just release. They have all the same right for care, but different profiles and stories. Appreciating the → **Diversity, equity, inclusion** of children in the system – and of their life stories can help to:

- better **tailor support** to the diverse needs of diverse children
- ensure that **effectiveness** is matched with individual children's needs
- streamline **referral systems**, by anticipating likely needs for support.

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-
- better **manage risk** – with awareness of risk profiles and generation of mechanism for oversight



Length of stay in the system varies (but it is unclear how)

Monitoring data did not allow to gauge duration of stay (and to identify different scenarios for different children). The evaluation gathered ideas on how to best do so, shared in the → [Companion Resource](#)

- **Evidence on length of stay is mostly anecdotal.** Anecdotal evidence from programme informants indicated a big variation. For example, some children bypass residential care, other end up staying in centres for long, as no alternative exist. For example, they cannot be reunited to their relatives still living in AS controlled areas, or they family ties are all radicalized.
- **There are no guidelines on length of stay.** There is no analysis / guideline providing at least some indication of suitable length of stay. Of course, no guideline should then be cast in stone, the primary needs of children should always come first. But having more indications about likely length and pattern of stay could provide structure to the programme.
- **Balance pressure for shorter (more cost-effective) stays with good case management.** The pressure is of course for shorter stays, increasing cost-effectiveness. And the programme made progresses in this respect The final report explains that it “exceeded targets through improvements in case management processes and strengthening of community/home-based care systems. This has meant we can take children out of residential care and reintegrate them into homes much quicker than in previous years”. But the push to shorter stays should always be balanced thorough case assessment. Some shared that *“these children spend around 7 years in a radicalization process and in 8 months you should rehabilitate them. It is not quite enough!”*.



Some children bypass interim care.

Not all children go through the more resource intensive residential interim care. Lower-risk children are rapidly put in community guardianship (Kismayo centre reported that often children get a guardian straight on arrival and never go to interim care).

- **Acknowledge a “two track” system.** It is important to outline well this emerging “two tracks” system. For example, if children go directly to vocational training + community care, how to best integrate specific CAAFAG support within a shorter track, more oriented to professionalization and livelihoods? The approach proposed by the programme – investing in safe spaces and centred on coaching – could be a way forward, but should be spelled out for residential care.



Case closure and follow up

As compared to the initial outline, the 2022 reintegration path outline includes case closure. This is indeed an important step, worth capturing: when can a children be considered sufficiently reintegrated? When can support stop?

- **Modalities, criteria for case closure should be clarified.** It is quite clear how a child enters the system. The exit process is much more faded, and little data and evidence about how it is structured were gathered. When does closure take place? What factors are considered? What does it entail? In the case of INTERSOM closure seemed to coincide with the end of vocational training, when children also receive a start-up pack. But can closure always be linked to the duration of vocational training and of project activities?
- **Challenges for case closure.** As for entering the system, there are different pathways and risk profiles also for closure. For example, handover of children with radicalized parents /relatives was sometimes challenging. What other factors would require attention? Better profiling of children can also improve exiting and follow up process. And it can ensure better risk management of recidivism (or identification of other risk factors for children, leading to marginalization / disenfranchisement).

Follow up

Reintegration is a long-term endeavour.

- **Are children accessing services?** During interim and community care children are also linked to local services. Are they sufficient for longer term reintegration? Do linkages continue after case closure? And on what social safety nets can they rely upon? There was no evidence of shared case management procedures / community level monitoring to check on this.
- **What happens to children?** Monitoring of reintegration long-term is not in place, so it is hard to understand what had happened to the children, in a systematic way. There is, however, informal contact. It has been reported that children might maintain relations with the centre for upwards of 3 of 4 years. Longer term monitoring could help to understand if the options proposed to children are working, and to better understand quality of reintegration and risk of

disenfranchisement. Are children now more resilient, and contributing to a more resilient society? [[→ ResilienceResilience](#)]

- **Long term support.** Experience of conflict have a deep impact, and the consequences of this might accompany children for all their lives. The programme is aware of it and working on mental and emotional skills. But will it be enough? Resources on MHPSS in CAAFAG also recommend the importance to “strengthen social support and community acceptance *over the long term*”. [[link](#)] Reminding stakeholders of the long-term nature of reintegration will matter, to avoid that care and community engagement can be planned appropriately, not as a quick fix solution.



The perspective of the pathway: it is now project-centred, not child-centred

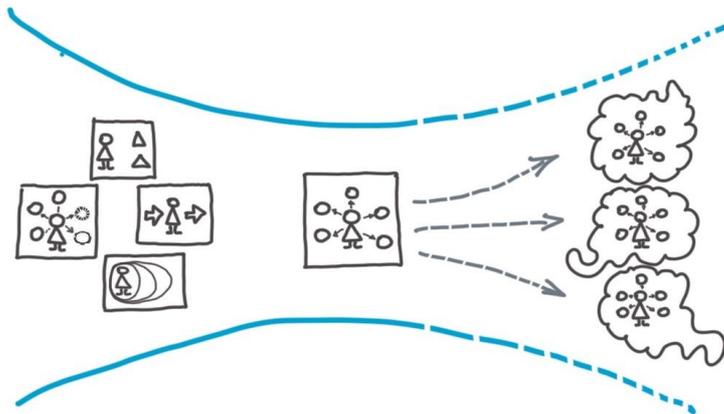
The outline as it is now more of a representation of types of programme services than of children’s experience through them. It tracks how many children are in each stage, at any moment. But tells little about individual pathways.

- **Diversity of children, diversity of pathways.** As said above, it is already evident that there is a “two track system”. But if diversity of children was appreciated, it would probably emerge that the tracks are more. Understanding how children trail the system is essential to streamline assistance. Understanding what pathways is likely to work best for what child would also help to better resource and budget services, address capacities, check effectiveness.
- **Getting to child-centred perspective.** Doing so would require stronger case management and capacity to aggregate information. Which is one of the programme weakest links. In discussion with partners and management it emerged, however, that even minimal data could provide valuable information and insights. This is illustrated in the [→ Companion](#) What matters is to shift the perspective: taking the client/children perspective would be a cartesian shift.

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Capturing models of intervention

Partners had different approaches and quality differed vastly. During the project, the **Elman approach emerged as the strongest practice**, calling for an investment on researching and sharing it. Capturing models of intervention speaks to the “complex system framing standards”. It is about understanding what factors can drive change, and how they interplay. The drawing illustrates the trajectory of model creation as it emerged:



1. Diverse approaches
learning by doing, with minimal consolidation /sharing

The programme worked with diverse partners. They operated, within an overall broadly agreed framework, in vastly diverse ways. Different models of operation were in place, with uneven standards. Monitoring and sharing were minimal

2. “Model creation”
Investment in monitoring and research

The programme is now at a critical juncture: selecting and consolidate a model of intervention. Based on engagement so far, it identified the most promising one. Resources for research, documentation have now been invested.

3. Mainstreaming
Investment in adaptation, scaling up, sharing for mainstreaming.

As the model of intervention shapes up, it will need to be tested, adapted, upscaled. Clarity on the core components and principles will be essential. Models for dissemination needs to accompany partners in adaptation – avoiding distortion.

Capturing approaches is not straightforward as outlining a step-by-step process! Successful approaches did not just rest on a blueprint of set activities. In the case of Elman there was something more. What is making the approach work? How can its magic be shared and replicated elsewhere?

The magic seems to lie in soft aspects - essentially, relations, attitudes of the carers. Behavioural, attitudinal components are harder to capture and share, and this will of course be a challenge for the programme. The programme is really at a critical juncture now. Its investment in research will pay off if accompanied by adaptation, shared learning. And in effective communication about the approach for accountability, advocacy, learning.

The emerging approach: the 5 pillars

At the time of writing this report, information about the ongoing research and on the emerging consolidation of Elman work was not yet available. The best information available was contained in the IOM/UNICEF project proposal. It described the 5 pillars approach as following:

 Safe space	 Social connections	 Emotional skills	 Referral network	 Youth driven
Provision of a safe space referring to both a physical and emotionally safe environment	Facilitation of Social connections access to different adult support structures	Mastery of social and emotional skills including anger management and mindfulness through fun and engaging activities	Provision of case management and establishment of external referral network for support services children are linked to a wider community of stakeholders /guardians	youth-driven, dynamic, and responsive to 'their' needs and wants: recreational diversity, vocational diversity, accountability

The following are ideas on how to strengthen the packaging of the approach. They build on the information gathered by the evaluation and on its direct exposure to the programme.



Beware the risk to normalize...

As approaches are shared, they risk to be normalized “ah! This is just another form of MHPSS support” The programme should find the sweet point amongst building on existing approaches (to avoid reinventing the wheel, to build on common ground) and showing what makes this specific one stand out

- **Show what creates the magic, clearly:** likely users will tend to reframe the approach within their mental framework and possibly missing what makes it special, which is often little tangible and invisible. Whatever products are generated, they should be clearly capturing the essence of the approach and avoid the risk of hide it beyond jargon.
- **Capture intangibles behind immediate results:** it was reported that “all the people visiting the centre understand that something special is going on”. One of the main challenges for documenting and sharing the approach will be to convey this feeling of energy. As much as possible the approach should be practice-based, not theory-centred: it should show how change, how approaches look in practice, and then guide people to see what lies behind it, emphasizing the intangibles behind the practice.
- **Highlight principles and cross cutting drivers:** clarity of principles and cross cutting drivers of the approach will ensure coherence. And will also ensure that adaptation will not distort the approach, and keep it true to its fundamentals.



Be realistic about different capacities and opportunities to deliver.

Elman has several advantages over other supporting partners. They are a larger organization, they are in the capital (so they can more easily reach to other organizations and partners), they have more programmes / donors (allowing to have multidimensional programmes). They are well known and connected. They have a much broader menu of possibilities! Other partners are aware of the existing differences, re: capacities, but also of opportunities, and worried that the model could be overambitious for them. The model delivered, the accompaniment process in place should be aware about this. Strategies for adaptation might include:

- **Partnerships in programmes, joint proposals.** Working together on a programme might help partners to better share practices. INTERSOM asked: “Could Weave of Change also support us in a programme?”
- **Identification of capacity gaps:** link the model with tools for capacity assessment, to more effectively identify and deal capacity gaps.

- **Clear identification of “the basics”.** What are the essential ingredients of the model? What are the optional practices? This could help to prioritize action and support.
- **Support to creative adaptation.** For example, Elman has vast premises, where activities for sensitization on environmental issues can be run –very beneficial for the mental health of children involved. INTERSOM has not such spaces: are there alternative, creative avenues to achieve this (e.g., by adopting a public space in town?)



Whose agency?

The approach is now “pillar oriented”, illustrating components of assistance. Yet, in discussion with programme management, it emerged that the programme is not so much about generic pillars. Is about shift in attitudes and behaviours of carers. It is about how carers can generate a safe space. About how they can be pivotal in generating a broader support system. About how they can nurture emotional skills... etc.

Describing the approach from carers perspective (for example: “As a child carer, I will...”) might look like a small cosmetic shift, but it is a much more powerful ways to spell the approach out and generate ownership.



Articulate the approach from a child-perspective

Linked to the above: what is the best way to describe the approach from a child perspective? (For example: As a child, I will have the right to...). Articulating the approach to be effectively shared to/by children can:

- **Empower children** – by making them more aware of their rights to assistance, and more conscious about what reintegration should involve.
- **Supporting stronger participation of and accountability to children.** Children can then better asses if the programme is fulfilling its promises – and to give better feedback. And they can better participate in decision making.
- **Supporting child-driven communication of the approach:** could the approach be shared in the voice of children? Could it support them to sharing their experiences, in ways that better capture the depth and the magic of the approach? Could it help them to share their changes and experiences, and become better role models?



Package and communicate the approach effectively

• **Design the approach to “stick” when shared.** Thinking communication from the inception can help to formulate the approach in more sharable ways. Find ways to make the approach memorable. Frame it powerfully (“5 pillars”, for example, have no traction), find crispy ways to describe the components... All this can go a long way to capture the personality of the approach and to “make it stick”

• **Use diverse communication avenues.** Manuals are usually the graveyard of communication. They can work as a reference tool, but definitely not for broad dissemination. Investing in visuals (e.g., a good infographic to be captured on posters, murals), on multimedia, on narrations... can better convey the specificity of the approach and get the message through.



Link it to effective processes to gain ownership and mastership (for coaches).

The programme knows the importance of dissemination. And it is realistic about the road ahead: quick training will not be enough! This approach requires ownership, mastership of practices, to be achieved gradually by caregivers. There will be a need to invest in accompaniment, exchanges, exposure, in the longer term.



Match it to likely pathways, in context.

Researching and illustrating how the model applies to children on diverse pathways could help partners to better implement it. Elman centre - being in the capital and serving children from remote locations - invests more in interim care. By comparison, the Kismayo centre refers more swiftly children to local community. How does the approach look in these diverse contexts? Showing applications of the approach on different pathways will be increasingly important as the programme increases regional coverage. [[-> The children experience: complex and diverse. How to best capture it?The children experience: complex and diverse. How to best capture it?\].](#)



Link it to a catalogue of practices.

How to make it happen? The approach builds on and integrate many practices. Examples of the most relevant ones should be added. For example: Elman is using Children Committees. How do they work? How to best establish them? Having specific guidance for significant activities could help partners to replicate them more effectively. The practice catalogue could be a growing one, and a shared endeavour: as other organizations develop interesting practices, they could be added on catalogue.

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Emphasize nested loops of integration.

The 5 pillars, as formulated now, might be understood simply as combining 5 types of activities: activities to develop mental skills... referral systems... etc. This perspective fits the usual “programme/activity driven view” of developmental and humanitarian actors.

The strength of the model, however, is its capacity to integrate all pillars in each and any activity. For example, how could a referral include issues of safe space, generation of connections, emotional skills and be youth driven? It might be important to document this aspect: it will help people not to stop at the “activity” level – the what, the typology of activities – but to investigate how they are delivered – the how, the interconnectedness and interdependency of the ingredients.



5 pillars within activities.

The 5 pillars are not “5 different types of activities”.

They are a holistic approach, where each activity should embody all pillars. All activities should happen in a safe space, promote linkages, support mental health, etc.

This interconnectedness was quite evident in its vocational training. Students were not just be trained as mechanics. They engaged in energizing activities games with multiple purpose. The alphabet game, where each letter was associated to a peace-building idea (P is for Peace...) taught them to read and write, celebrated positive words, transformed a classroom in a fun and healthy space, broken barriers amongst students and trainers. The energy they put in the game was testimony of this.

Key learning

- **Appreciation of complexity exist (leading to TOC elements) but it is not captured effectively.** Lack of tools to capture and share understanding limits strategic options, learning, and makes knowledge much more vulnerable to turnover
- **The importance of a pathway.** Having a clear rehabilitation pathway is key for the project – to improve management, coordination, advocacy, etc. The existing one is not yet fit for purpose, and struggles to capture the diverse experiences of children. The needed cartesian shift is from a project-centred approach, to a child-centred one.
- **The programme is aware of the need to consolidate its approach. And it is investing resources in it.** A challenge for the programme was that approaches suitable to the Somali context were not available. Implementing partners tried and tested options, now harvested. This is a key and critical investment of the programme. It will help the project not just to demonstrate “outcomes”, but to have evidence on the processes in place. Effective sharing will now be key.

Adaptive sustainability

Is change sustaining? And is it worth sustaining?



Evaluate transformational sustainability as manifesting ecosystem resilience and adaptability at the nexus between humans and the environment.

- *Employ a dynamic view of sustainability.*
- *Make ecosystem viability and resilience the focus of sustainability not program, project, or intervention continuity.*

This criterion does not simply ask “with the outcomes of the programme last (as in the usual criteria of sustainability do!), but first and foremost question: should the outcomes of the programme last? Are they beneficial for the social and natural environment, for the whole ecosystem?”

The programme trajectory

The programme should (and could not) not sustain as it is. And it is aware of it: the institutional architecture needs to be broadened; the capacity of partners increased. The following are highlights of the trajectory that the programme is on. It is an **expansive, developmental** one, needed to ensure better quality, reach and, ultimately, sustainability.



Transitioning to national/local support

Eventually this programme will be handed over to the government [[Error! Reference source not found.](#)] and will thrive on regional/community oversights and ownership. Transition is still a long-term goal, and the reintegration architecture is still forming.

Having broad strategic trajectory for handover can help to plan investment and actions needed for a stronger, swifter transition, and to avoid time-lag. The investment made by UNICEF in supporting academic curricula and training for social workers (filling and existing gap) is a good example of anticipating needs: professional staff is now available, at the time of demand.

Criticalities of transitioning now seems to be mainly linked to clarity of pathways of reintegration, oversight of case management (and linked capacities).



Expand reach

The programme is in the process of expanding its reach in diverse ways.

- **Expand coverage:** the programme coverage is uneven, and centres exist only in a few region of Somalia. This limits support to children close to their communities, and impact on liaising and work with local actors. Current projects are now expanding the number of reintegration centres, and the regions of operation – in connection with other international organizations and partners (e.g., through the IOM/UNICEF project).
- **Expand age:** new centres and new partnerships will be designed to support youth up to the age of 24. This was based on the understanding that “while age distinction, categorizing those under 18 as children and those over 18 as adults, is fundamental to determining the rights of children, age markers are imprecise in differentiating between the biological and physiological development of youth, and in practice there is often little distinction between 17- and 21-year-olds in terms of brain development, adjustment, and cultural milestones”. This will ensure more continuity of support and reach but will come with advocacy challenges: international frameworks on child rights will not apply to young adults, and diverse evidence and arguments need to be formed.



Improve capacities and approaches.

The programme is investing substantially in the creation of approaches and capacities to be then disseminated, rolled out, adapted. [[Capturing models of intervention](#)]



Preventive approaches?

The programme is very aware that the main challenge ahead is to reduce – in the first place - recruitment and abuse- And that this cannot be reached but the programme as it is now. This realization is challenging, but also positive: it means that the programme is shifting from being mainly response-oriented one towards a risk management mindset.

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A risk management mindset, to build meaningful resilience.



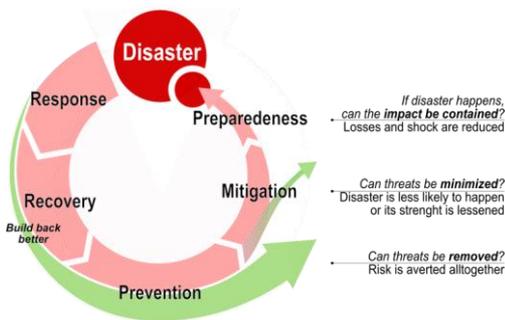
The importance of a risk perspective

Looking at issues as “risk” and not just “problems” help to expand understanding. Problems are static and are addressed – often simply patched! - as they appear. Risk is dynamic. It requires forward-looking capacity, ability to anticipate threats (beyond the obvious ones!), awareness that deeper causes need to be addressed. A risk perspective broadens the scope of action: beyond response towards preventive approaches.



A risk perspective can be transformative.

Risk management comes in several flavours. Absorbing / adapt / transform. Unfortunately, risk management has often been mostly dealt with as a matter of absorbing (risk warning, surge capacities, response). Notwithstanding that all capacities are needed and must be combined, risk management as *transformation* (understand that addressing risk requires transforming the status quo) is a valuable paradigm for the CAAFAG programme.



This picture shows the disaster management cycle as seen from this evaluation.

Definitions are in line with international UNDRR glossaries.

But the picture does not depict the traditional cycle where disaster is condemned to repeat. It highlights the importance of getting away from risk (along the green arrow) or to reduce its magnitude and its effects (the red arrow).

More clarity about where preparedness, mitigation, prevention fit in the cycle can help to rethink and strengthen approaches.

Looking at the programme with risk management lenses



Response (saving lives):

The programme demonstrated capacity to save children lives. It avoided imprisonment and death penalty for captured children; it saved at-risk children from the danger of the battlefield; defecting children from the risk of being apprehended and punished. It built GBV response capacities of SNA and MoIS and referred survivors.



Rehabilitation (saving livelihoods):

The programme is helping children at risk to rebuild their lives, to acquire livelihoods. In doing so, it has the potential to “build back better”: by offering → [Diversity of CAAFAG children](#) ~~Diversity of CAAFAG children~~ [of options](#); by tapping into → [Transformational potential of children](#) ~~Transformational potential of children~~.



Prevention (removing fully the risk).

Prevention means that risk of recruitment and abuse is fully removed. For example, that armed forces will not recruit and use children. Preventive capacity was uneven, it remained a concern:

- In the government-controlled part of Somalia, the programme is proving that a mix of political will, orders, training, sanctioning, oversights can prevent (or strongly limit) recruitment. However, *use* might remain a challenge, being more informal.
- Al Shabaab controlled areas, where most recruitment is happening, are out of bound. The suite of interventions usually employed to prevent recruitment (e.g., protocols with authorities and armed forces, MHPSS support, parenting programmes, livelihood support, etc) is simply not applicable. Research was commissioned to identify drivers of recruitment, and found that the main factor leading to recruitment is, simply, to be born in an area where children are regularly recruited. As stated in the final report “There is growing awareness within UNICEF and the

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broader UN donor community that programming which does not address the major perpetrator of grave child rights abuses in Somalia is, manifestly, insufficient". Prevention is a standstill, yet it clearly needs to be tackled. One possible avenue rests on reclaiming humanitarian space, overcoming → ~~The risk of taking one side~~
The risk of taking one side



Mitigation (limiting the risk):

Mitigation strategies exist are in place to *reduce* the risk of recruitment. They include, for example, community liaison programmes - reaching also within Al Shabab controlled areas - helping children at risk to escape or defect (they rest on confidence of children / families in the reintegration process, and on the provision of funds and support for travelling to safe areas). Mitigation strategies build on programme capacity to → ~~Operating in the grey area~~
Operating in the grey area

Mitigation strategies are also needed to address threats of *using and abusing* children: whilst the risk of recruitment is preventable, the risk of use and abuse less so – and less easy to define. It can take many forms, and depends on many factors: poverty, values, attitudes towards children and women rights. It is likely to be more contextual and requiring ad-hoc approaches. It is on the mitigation front that most innovations are likely to happen.

The programme had also made efforts to mitigate the risk of rape and sexual violence, and this proved a sensitive issue to deal with openly.

Preparedness (limiting the impact).

How can be children protected if recruitment and abuse are not prevented and mitigated?

The programme addresses this with release mechanisms for children captured in combat – and with sensitization to armed forces about the rights of children in conflict.

The programme could also consider if it needs surge capacity: capacity to identify likely situations and conditions leading to peaks of abuse (e.g., population movements, IDP setups). Liasson officers could be pivotal for preparedness.



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Resilience

Resilience is essential to sustain change. Resilience means that children, their carers, their communities can live a life free from fear and to realize their rights in the face of threats. They are resilient when they have capacities to absorb, to adapt, to transform the threat of being affected by conflict (and, specifically, of being engaged, used, abused by armed forces and groups). **Absorb** is mainly about response to the challenge. **Adapt** demands capacity to mitigate, to make a dent in factors of risk. **Transform** is the ambition to make society a better place: addressing CAAFAG challenges might also open perspectives for peace, collaboration, abundance within society: the same factors hitting CAAFAG children are the root causes of other issues in society.

Resilience is essentially about power and empowerment. It requires shifting perspectives, putting children at the centre. This ambition might seem far-fetched for a programme responding to lifesaving needs of extremely marginalized children. But now that that the basics architecture is set, a resilience outlook could be the key for adaptation, for innovation, for local ownership. Such resilience outlook would conflate the importance of forward-looking, risk aware programming with agency of children. As per UNICEF protection strategy “adolescent children are one of the principal and determining stakeholders in the protection of themselves and other children. Without their co-creation of programmes, there is very little likelihood that the programmes will resonate with them, and its impact will be limited”



The evaluation already noticed that making the programme more child-centred would be a cartesian shift. Putting a child at the centre to understand if and to what extent s/he is resilient means to look at:

- **diverse domains of power**, as illustrated. They all matter and are needed.
- **their linkages**. Power is good when it “flows”. Imagine arrows connecting different powers. For example, power WITHIN (e.g., the power of having new professional skills) becomes useful when it led to power OF (e.g., earnings). And power OF (having money) could then be used to get new assets (power OF) or safely stored, e.g., with saving groups (power WITH).

All these linkages and flows help to design the theory of action of a programme: which factors is a programme willing to tackle?

The table below show examples of different domains of power: what do they consist of, in practice? How is the programme is tackling them? What are the resilience challenges linked to them?



Domains of power

The power OF: Access to services and resources

Access to dedicated services ensures an immediate response to CAAFAG needs. Access, more broadly, to protection services, to assets, to financial support decreases the risk for children to face needs and threats. Availability of finances and assets for a life free of needs helps to escape the poverty trap nurturing recruitment and conflict. The programme has supported CAAFAG children power OF by:

- access to services (e.g., interim centres, vocational centres, schools – and other services through referral)
- Access to financial resources / assets to live a life free of need (e.g., start-up kits).
- have safe passageways / transport when defecting



The power WITHIN: Knowledge, awareness, skills

The programme had done considerable work to strengthen power WITHIN of the children:

- practical skills (in vocational centres)
- emotional skills / mental health (which is at the core of the Elman model, and will now be research and promoted)



The power WITH: Social support and connections

When children can access and be supported by other individuals, groups, and networks, they are better placed to realize their rights. The programme strengthen power WITH:

- community support (by influencing leaders)
- children are reached by liaison work, connecting local communities to national actors
- social linkages within community (e.g., guardianship, referrals)
- peer-support

Sustainability challenges

- Communities are ridden by poverty: assets and finances remain very low.
- Beside a limited coverage of (dedicated) services, most children in Somalia do not have access essential services.
- Dedicated services are still massively depending on donors' funds.
- The actual access to livelihoods for children in the programme and their sustainability not been assessed.

- The long-term impact of being a CAAFAG child on mental health is still little explored.
- The skillset offered in vocational training is quite conventional and little diverse: is it really tailored to individual needs?
- The programme is investing in emotional and mental skills, at the individual level. Can it also look at strengthening a sense of "citizenship" (accountability, voice, participation skills)?

- The importance of a "safe space for children is acknowledged by the project, but communities still face internal conflict reducing possibilities for children to connect (and rather putting them at risk of stigmatization).
- All the measures mentioned are still embryonal. Coverage is still limited, and it is hard to reach the geographical areas where CAAFAG abuses are the highest.
- Community support mechanisms are informal, ad hoc, and still little structured. Children are their clients, rather than active actors within it
- Opportunity for peer support amongst children and youth are still limited. Peer support was proposed, not achieved



The power OVER: Supportive policies and institutions

When the rights of children are protected and supported by the existing institutions (through their norms, policies, systems in place). When children are recognized as citizens, they have more voice, opportunities, access to support. And they can make choices. The programme:

- Started to build an institutional architecture (with governmental actors) – supported by clear law, policies, and protocols: the rights of CAAFAG children are more recognized.
- Sensitized some important decision makers (at national level, within communities) to children / women / CAAFAG rights.
- Resourced institutions to keep their policies in check (e.g., screening of recruitment).

- In a patriarchal society, structural norms at different levels (from the family to the nation) limit voice, agency of children – and often act against their interest and will. This is understood by hard to address.
- Diverse form of governance and legislations co-exist in Somalia, which the programme is not yet able to influence.
- The institutional architecture – more receptive to rights - is still fledging and it is not always easy to generate ownership of rights-based worldviews.
- Children are benefitting from better policies and institutions, but mostly as passive recipients. Citizenship of children (e.g., through accountability mechanisms, involvement in decision making) has been so far limited, even within the institutions directly supporting them)
- Recognition of children agency within the programme is still limited. How to strengthen accountability and participation?



The “eco power”: Living in a healthy environment

A healthy natural environment support lives and livelihoods and reduces potential causes of conflict. The programme had not yet openly addressed environmental issues. Ideas follow.

Degradation of natural systems has been highlighted amongst the factors aggravating conflict – and ultimately leading to poverty, divisions, recruitment.

The table above has simply sketched resilience factors. Some insights could be offered by the system map, as all factors have been mapped there [[→ Using complexity lenses](#)]. The complexity map is also a power sensitive tool and can start to give an idea of intricacies. A full resilience analysis, however, goes beyond the scope of this evaluation, and would require involvement of key project stakeholders, to ensure quality as well as ownership of process and understanding. The reflections so far suffice to say that a resilience framework.

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- would be compatible with the project. **This project is about resilience** and making power more explicitly could better help to address deep roots of CAAFAG challenges.
- Would help to **generate novel lasting solutions**, by answering the question: can children (and their communities) be supported to have more power to absorb, adapt, transform the CAAFAG challenges and their drivers?
- could help to make a project more “**child-centred**” – which is a need for the programme.
- Could help to strengthen the importance of “**soft factors**” of change (which tend to be under “power WITH, power OVER) and make it more visible to stakeholders. This would avoid that that “power of” is more overwhelmingly visible and reported upon
- Could generate **needed shifts in M&E systems** to capture all the above (be more power oriented, have a long-term perspective, be child-centred, focusing on resilience rather than immediate outcomes only)

The eco-power: CAAFAG vs. environmental concerns

Adaptive sustainability demands to also look at the connection of human and natural environment. This might seem not strictly relevant for the project. Yet, it is an urgent and unavoidable cross-cutting question now. Every programme should check if and how it can also limit the damage to our ecosystems, at the brink of collapse.



Environmental factors matter

Environmental factors impact increasingly on living conditions in Somalia, a country significantly exposed to natural hazards and climate change. *UNICEF is aware of this*: children in Somalia at ‘extremely high risk’ of the impacts of the climate crisis.

It is evident that environmental degradation is – and will increasingly be – one of the factors driving and/or affecting conflict in Somalia. In a vicious cycle it can then aggravate the risk for children to be affected by conflict. Environmental factors should be factored in when considering how to prevent violations against CAAFAG.



Transforming the lives of children, to transform their environment.

- **Invest in environmentally-sound skills and capacities.** The programme is investing in training, in supporting livelihoods. It should ensure that this investment goes into skillsets and livelihoods that can replenish, not harm the environment, such as environmentally sound

livelihoods. This can happen by adapting existing curricula (electricians, plumbers can all employ resource saving measures, for example), and/or by promoting “climate jobs”. Environmental awareness can generate needed diversity in the offer for children. [[→ Diversity, equity, inclusion](#)]. Elman has, for example, some facilities for gardening.

- **Enable children to be agents of environmental transformation.** The evaluation already discussed the [→ Transformational potential of children](#). It highlighted how children can give back to the communities welcoming, investing their energies in improving them. Awareness of environmental issues could be a powerful avenue for engagement in communities.
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This criterion requires to look at the connection of the human and natural environment, and this might seem far-fetched. Truth is that environmental issues will increasingly have an impact on an already frail country.

Key learning

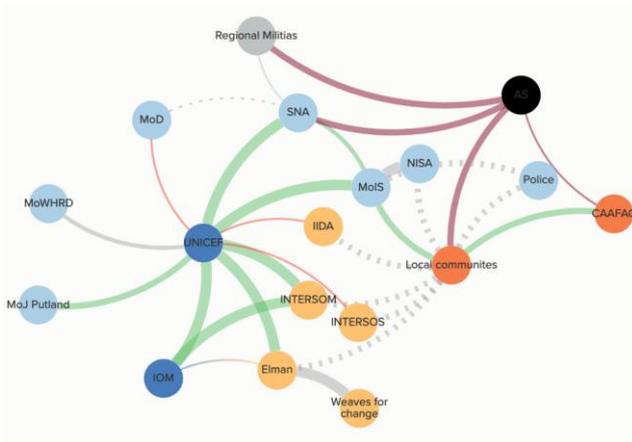
- **Trajectory for sustainability.** The programme is not sustainable and fit for the challenge as it is now: hence the need for expansion, on different fronts (strengthen institutional architecture for transitioning; increase coverage; build capacities). All this is already in the programme radar.
- **Risk-oriented mindsets.** By acknowledging the challenges of “prevention” the programme is shifting from a response to a risk-management mindset. This is a key shift to improve sustainability, provided that the programme has a transformative appreciation of risk management. Adequate risk-oriented frameworks for action are needed.
- **Resilience.** The programme is essentially about resilience of children and their communities to live a life free from risk of conflict and CAAFAG related abuses. Yet the concept of resilience has not been used by the programme so far. Resilience as empowerment could help to value soft issues, and put children at the centre, as active actors.
- **Environmental issues.** Environmental issues have not been factored in by the programme, but they are amongst the root causes of conflict. The programme has untapped potential to sensitize children and communities about them, whilst transforming practically their lives and livelihoods.

Interconnectedness Momentum



- Identify, understand, and evaluate the interconnections that are essential and integral to transformation.
- Evaluate whether, how, and to what extent interconnections among people, networks, institutions, ideas, and movements are deepened and enhanced to support, nurture, catalyse, and accelerate transformational trajectories.
 - Evaluate whether, how, and to what extent dysfunctional and constraining interconnections are disrupted and broken to liberate positive transformational energy and momentum.

Looking at the interconnectedness momentum means answering the question “How are people achieving change, together?” The evaluation sketched the network of main stakeholders based on information available in the report and then complemented it with interview findings. During the project, partnerships strengthened (in green) or weakened (light red). Significant changes include UNICEF 1) transitioning from partnership with Ministry of Defence to a direct partnership with the Somali National Army and 2) a reduction in the number of implementing partners. More stakeholders are of course involved, and the real map would be much more articulated – showing for example institutions’ departments, or the intricacies of “local communities”



Stakeholders outline

This is an outline of the key stakeholders of the programme. Please access the → [online interactive map](#) (with more information on actors and their connections).

This is not an exhaustive map! It could of course be enriched and improved by looking more closely at the dynamics in place. As such does not represent “the state of things”. It is a way to share the understanding achieved so far of the most significant relations, and a basis for further discussion.

A fledging institutional architecture.

The programme achieved stronger and constructive relations government institutions, and it is also supporting coordination amongst them. There is a strong sense amongst these involved that the programme really grew in the last years. As already mentioned, and → Institutional architecture and support is emerging, more defined on the “defence actors” side.



Modelling the reintegration architecture.

Who should have oversight on children once they enter the system? Who should ensure monitor reintegration? The institutional architecture for this is not yet in place, and it is a clear strategic priority. The programme piloted linkages with restorative justice: in Puntland a child protection unit was set within the Puntland Martial Court System, in collaboration with the juvenile justice programme. A challenge for the reintegration system is the weakness of line ministries (e.g., the Ministry of Women and Human Rights. One challenge in handing over the programme is its sensitivity - and the zero tolerance to recidivism [[link](#)].



Shifting beliefs, to build a common set of owned values.

Setting an institutional architecture is not simply about coordination. Institutional actors must be aware and own and share principles and values. Curbing recruitment of children, facilitating release required understanding that minors are still children, that they should not be held responsible: that they are victims and survivors, not abusers. Reintegration requires destigmatization, and the will of society to support “deviance”. Justice should be restorative,

regenerative, transformative. Shifting beliefs within institutions is not an easy task, but a massive cultural shift. [→ [Attitudes, perceptions](#)Attitudes, perceptions] Yet, being a soft component of change, they might be undervalued. What was already achieved by the programme should be appreciated as a main achievement: attitudes to recruitment [↗ [link](#)], confidence in rehabilitation[↗ [link](#)], awareness of children rights [↗ [link](#)], and women rights [↗ [link](#)], had to shift to build fertile ground for new practices and commitment. The effort needed to continue building shared and transformative values - within and across institutions – shall not be underplayed.



Clarify roles and responsibilities

Strengthening the institutional architecture requires to clarify roles and responsibilities. “The programme is not coherent yet, but it is good! We work with so many lines ministries, and agencies!”. Understanding who is best placed to do what, and how to ensure coordination and collaboration is a strategic task for the next period.



A need to strengthen technical coordination

The need to strengthen technical (and not just political) coordination [↗ [link](#)] was highlighted. “Political and technical meetings should be different!” Technical coordination is the practical variety: understanding what is going on, avoiding duplication of effort, set mechanisms for getting the job done. People are collaborating “on the job”, but specific technical forums were requested, to streamline work, to make coordination more effective. It was highlighted that “Ministries have their own child protection unit. They need to work together more!”. Coordination at the technical level needs encouragement, oversight, support.



Strengthen human resources within the institutions

Strengthening capacities within institution will also matter:

- The project invested in **training** [↗ [link](#)], in **partnership with SNA** (and it will be important to check that awareness will continue to be raised / maintained as partnership with MoD came to an end)
- The **MoIS is selecting and investing in capacities Liaison Officers**. Their role is evolving on-the-job, managing often informal relations, and will need to be consolidated (liaison will be discussed more in detail in the next section).
- Case management and support services **require strong social workers** – to be employed across ministries (e.g., Ministry of Internal Security, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of women). Such professional figures have been lacking, UNICEF addressed this with the setup of academic curricula. The priority now for the programme is to ensure that that trained professional staff is recruited in support of child rehabilitation. And that it can contribute to professionalize the institutions where they work.



Feeding learning back in the system

The system architecture is not pre-set. It is evolving in response to challenges and opportunities. The people involved had a role in shaping it: through coordination, informal collaboration. Nudging, soft advocacy by UNICEF was practiced, to ensure that models and practice tested rested on appreciation of rights of children and women. In such context, capacity to learn by doing and to institutionalize processes and practices matter. Yet mechanisms in place are still weak. It is not a given that practices can be institutionalized, bottom up. The institutional architecture should acquire capacity for → [Capturing models of intervention](#)Capturing models of intervention

CAAFAG as a cross cutting concern, to expand the architecture

Quality of referral systems, overall improvement of services in country will have a positive effect on CAAFAG. A multisectoral and multi-layered system can create the ecosystem of services and support CAAFAG need. Ideally, CAAFAG issues should be considered as a cross cutting issue by other national and international actors (donors, service providers). This could improve options and modalities of access to services for CAAFAG children, as well as coverage and access - beyond what the programme alone can achieve. Advocacy might be needed to this end.

Relations amongst local actors

Please note: The evaluation did not have first-hand exposure to local actors – beyond implementing partners. It gathered sufficient understanding to at least outline community-level work from reports and interviews with key stakeholders.

Action at community level is key for CAAFAG reintegration: to identify and select children at risk; to link them to carers; to support them in the long term. Diverse activities, diverse stakeholders interlink. This happens quite organically, with relatively unstructured processes and coordination – also because of the sensitivity of the issue.

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Local stakeholders are involved in quite diverse activities, as outlined in the following. Learning from and streamlining relations amongst local actors shall be a strategic endeavour for the future strategy of intervention.



Liaison

This is the interface amongst national level architecture and local work, which is gradually strengthening. There are semi-formal structures in place, linking government departments (MoIS and NISA - the intelligence and security agency) with communities' representatives (e.g., of clans, of local institutions). Liaison [[link](#)] is instrumental to locate children needing support and to transfer them to centres. It is a very sensitive activity, as it stretches its reach also within AS controlled areas. Liaison workers are trained (since 2021) and operate anonymously. Police and security forces also contribute to liaison efforts. The community Liaison programme is still at the early stages. It is improving its reach and effectiveness, but coverage, capacities are still uneven. Support for fuller coverage, and for strengthening its → **Error! Reference source not found.** are the way forward.



Selection of children

Selection of children for the programme is still a challenging issue. Some cases are no-brainers: the children captured in operations and referred by the armed forces. But what about lower risk children? And how to best select children from the host community? (programme includes a quote of host community children in vocational support to avoid resentment against former combatants).

- **Selection committees:** The programme links to selection committees, which should normally consist of ministries representatives, district authorities, representatives of elders / women and from implementing partners. But such selection committees have not been always strong. They tend to coordinate and operate informally (e.g., by phone rather than in person)
- **Accountability in the selection process:** Accountability needs to be strengthened. There is a risk that the attractiveness of the programme can get in the way, and there could be manipulative attempts of nepotistic selections by these in power. If participation is a privilege, selection committees might then not choose the most at risk or disadvantaged children. In a context where simplistic criteria are not applicable, where the personal history of children should better not be openly disclosed, etc. selection might become opaque. UNICEF monitors and programme officers can have a strong role in keeping these community mechanisms in check. Also, partners should be supported in maintaining risk and exposure to abuse profiles to help gauging, at least retroactively, quality of selection. [[different risk levels different risk levels](#)]



Guardianship (for non-residential care)

Non-residential community-based care rests on guardianship [[link](#)]. Guardians are selected with the involvement of community and clan leaders. INTERSOM explained that low-risk children can be very swiftly handed over to guardians, reducing the need for the more specialized interim care. The children met in the centres were satisfied with the arrangement and mentioned positive relations with their guardians. Guardianship will remain an important component of the programme, so learning on how to make selection, support, monitoring of guardian more effective should be a priority for the programme.



Referrals: an ecosystem of reintegration services [[link](#)]

Beside access to schooling (for younger children) and vocational training (for the older ones) which other services are children accessing? Which services are needed, as a priority? Staff, for example, mentioned the need for referral for drug addiction. There is no data about the referrals provided and about the ecosystem of reintegration services available in diverse areas. As the programme seeks to expand in further region, promptly mapping the services available (to avoid duplication of offer, to provide a broader support) – and tracking the referrals made should be a priority.



Broader community outreach [[link](#)]

Can the programme reach out more broadly the community members, and sensitize them about CAAFAG, and about children and protection rights? Broader community outreach could support identification of children at risk: it might create awareness about the rights of CAAFAG: it can shift perceptions to their regards. But there are also concerns: that CAAFAG children could be stigmatized, that outreach might attract too much attention over a programme that needs to operate in conflict ridden and insecure environments, that the people involved in the programme might be put at risk. The choice, until now, has been minimal outreach, mostly directed to community leaders. Messages were shared with community, but the outreach is unclear.



Local accountability mechanisms

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Local coordination is mostly action oriented. No evidence emerged of local accountability mechanisms, through which community members or children could be informed about and give feedback on the programme – with a positive impact on community awareness and engagement.

Supporting outreach

Most connections with communities happen informally, tapping on existing relations / channels. What are the challenges and opportunities to strengthen engagement with and amongst community actors? What options are in place to strengthen and broaden connections?



Sensitivities

The profile of the programme is very low key, because of the sensitivity of the topic.

- In the current context, emphasis on the programme might put at risk implementing partners and community members engaging in liaison, attracting undesired attention from armed groups thriving on recruitment.
- Children themselves need to be protected: they might be defectors, radicalized, traumatized, violated individuals... all conditions that suggest averting excessive attention on them.



Trainings

Trainings for community leaders have been organized, to increase understanding on child protection and prevention of recruitment. Please note that the evaluation could not access the training curricula and materials – to get a better sense on the content and on the modalities to disseminate information. Neither it could meet training participants. It appears that:

- The **outreach** of the training has been quite limited considering the dimension of the programme. Most trainings happen to Mogadishu, other regions are far less reached.
- **Level of uptake**, if and how training trickled in the communities is not clear. Monitoring of uptake is not in place. There was evidence of mechanisms for supporting local **champions**, nor stories of follow up on training.



Awareness raising, dissemination of messages [↗ link](#)

The evaluation investigated strategies for communication with communities. Very little emerged. It was a project activity but had little traction. The sensitivity of the programme of course gets in the way: it is hard to call against recruitment in areas where Al Shabaab is actively pursuing it. The following had emerged - from people consulted:

- News about events (e.g. trainings happening in Mogadishu) have been shared on **television**
- **Radio** has not been much used - it was unclear why
- **Social media** has not been used. There is not an official page for the programme, and the existing ones of government institutions are not fit for purpose.
- Former participants to the training have minimal engagements: **WhatsApp contacts** have been shared, but there is no active channel for broadcasting regularly information.
- **Sharable handouts** – e.g. provided to participants to training - was not available.
- On the implementing partner side, Elman is quite active on social media, but its audience is mostly an English speaking international one. Yet children are involved in production of content, an interesting avenue worth pursuing (as discussed further in the → companion).
- In the current context – given the sensitivity of the topic - **conventional awareness campaigns** are challenging. The programme could however check if lower-key information sharing, informed by **communication for development practices** could open novel, needed avenues.



Logistical support

Logistical support is essential to help children-at-risk to access reintegration services (children at risk might include children willing to defect, children needing to escape force conscription, or children engaging with known radicalized groups). Swift availability of funds is essential, for example, to pay and organize for their transport – as reported by liaison officers. Logistics is of course organized informally and sensibly – given that it also involves MoIS and NISA. It requires speed of action, adaptiveness, knowledge of the territory – and remain risky.

Children: relations amongst them and with their community

Engagement with children by the evaluation was short but intense. There was a strong sense of energy, of togetherness in the centres visited. This is a major achievement for a programme supporting children uprooted from their communities. What relations are children now forming? This matters: building social capital is ultimately what reintegration is all about (and the most powerful antidote against disenfranchisement [↗ link](#))



Rebuilding relations, from scratch. Where next?

Children met in the centres had to start from scratch. Their former life and contacts were gone, they found themselves in a perceived hostile environment (this is how it was depicted to them before). Forging new relations is not easy. Children tended to relate on a few close friends, often their first encounters. These relations were major achievements to them. Generating diverse connections amongst children (in the centres, outside them) will be key. Are relations forged on day-to-day activities enough? Should the programme invest more in social activities – including with community members? (e.g., sport, cultural events)?



We were alone.

Most children shared their fear, when arrived at the centre, to be alone, in a hostile community. A few months ahead, they forged linkages, they have friends, they are not afraid of others. Children in the INTERSOM centre, explained how they built new friendship little by little. They have a few “best friends”. The sense of “belonging to a group” was not yet there, but the first steps were done. Body language can tell a lot. The close, relaxed relations of these children demonstrate a huge achievement for them. Social connections are vital and needed for reintegration. Yet often not captured or valued by reporting narratives and indicators.



Is diversity getting in the way?

In the centres diverse children coexist, high and low risk, from AS and from local communities. Dealing with this diversity is potentially very challenging. Partners asserted capacity to cope with these challenges, but it would be important to look at this issue more: to better understand what mixes they are confronted with, to identify the most likely challenges, to derive sharable good practices. An implementing partner, for example, suggested that localized regional centres could facilitate coexistence by bringing together children with a more similar background.



Transformational relations

Implementing partners are keen to transform children’s roles and relations. It was impressive to see, in the Elman centre, boys and girls mixing in the same training. In the INTERSOM centre – in the more conservative Kismayo - training were separated, but boys and girls could still meet in the premises. These apparently minor details are a strong indication of the willingness and commitment of partners to model new, healthy relations amongst girls and boys, a good start to challenge toxic masculinity.



Making children active actors, within support institutions.

Elman has a practice of children committees, to ensure that children can better feedback and be involved in decision making. Unfortunately, it was not possible to meet children engaging in such institutions and get their views, and details about their involvement. How can children be active actors (not just passive recipients!) within their supporting institutions? Only then the project can become truly transformational, empowering role. Practices for building citizenship should become integral to the reintegration process. CAAFAG supporting services can start by modelling accountability and participation within them



Mechanisms for feedback and whistleblowing

There was no evidence of mechanisms for feedback or whistleblowing accessible to children. Yet UNICEF had witnessed, during the project, not-up-to-standard treatment. It could only be revealed with monitoring at a short notice. Protection services need feedback mechanisms accessible to children: channels to improve accountability, feedback, support.



Peer-to-peer support and sensitization?

Some children manage to maintain contact – by phone - with their closest friends in AS controlled areas (but this was not always the case: some children came from villages out of reach). When asked: “can this be an opportunity to influence other children at risk? Can you share to your friends that there are alternatives to recruitment and conflict?” children were not optimistic. These are very sensitive messages, discussing these issues can put children at risk. They are very weary to do so. They feel friends believe them, there is mutual trust. Yet these messages are hard to share and hard to action.



The desire to feel international presence

International presence in the programme has been really limited: UNICEF staff were very restricted from visiting the children, beyond the capital. As I visited the centre in Kismayo, children told me I was the first foreigner they had ever seen in their lives, and asked me: “why other foreigners never came here”? They explained that seeing foreigners, feeling international support means a lot to them. This was a genuine request. The programme should consider how to strengthen presence and direct connection with children, to make international commitment more real to them and to their communities.



Linkages and collaboration for better livelihoods.

The project proposal innovation clubs where “youth formerly associated with armed forces will join other community youth to form youth clubs promoting innovation, initiate income generating activities”. The evaluation could not reveal no example of such clubs. The children met in Kismayo were planning to set business with their closest friends. Trainers informally shared suggestions on business management, but there was little more than this. This seems to indicate need for:

- more structured support to **foster linkages and collaboration amongst children**, to strengthen their safety nets
- closer engagement with **local entrepreneurs**, with the ambition to setup more diverse and ambitious livelihoods alternatives (e.g., new professions, larger enterprises, “climate jobs”)



We will set our business together!

Children in a tailoring class shared their plans. What will they do next? Most of them plan to set a business with a close friend. Usually, they are sitting close by in the classroom, a strong sign of vicinity. It is already an important step that children see the importance of working together. But can the project support more the “social capital” side of setting a livelihood, and in more creative ways?

Sharing learning

Interconnectedness momentum is also about “sharing ideas”. The programme is trailing new options for CAAFAG reintegration, learning is key. Are project stakeholders effectively sharing their learning? Is this conducive to better practices and approaches?



Sharing learning across implementing partners

- **Partners operated largely in isolation**, with no engagement amongst them. In some case competition crept in, further reducing opportunities for sharing and learning. But things are starting to change. As the evaluation took place, a partner visited another centre. This was a first! The experience was very positive, on both sides. Personal ties, strengthened, desire of collaboration increased, and foundations for future exchanges were set.
- **Mechanisms for sharing learning** until now lacking. Learning is largely experiential, and implementing partners need support to be aggregate, consolidate it. The programme is already committed to consolidate and share learning: the new project is investing considerably into this. → Capturing models of intervention
- **The COVID pandemic** – happened during the programme – certainly reduced options for interaction and exchange (given that it further limited options to meet and share in presence). Many reported Zoom/Teams fatigue, and the challenges of relying only on these means of communication.



Sharing practices, internationally

- Children are recruited and affected by war in other countries (beyond Somalia it is mainly Afghanistan, Democratic republic of Congo, Syria, Yemen). There is then potential for

sharing ideas, practices with such other contexts – which has not been tapped in. The evaluation could not reveal any significant international engagement.

- The approach modelled by UNICEF has certainly the potential to become state of the art. Important to ensure sharing.
- Partners signalled their interest in cross-country exposure to practices on CAAFAG



Engagement with academia

- UNICEF has invested in academic curricula to strengthen social work. It is now expected that more professionalized social workers can be recruited in the system, to strengthen quality of interventions, case management, coordination.

The risk of taking one side

Al Shabaab is framed as an insurgent, terrorist group in the context of Somalia. **International organizations** (UN, international cooperation organizations) tend to **support the government** developmental efforts, and have no engagement with AS. Also, Al Shabaab itself strongly contrast these international actors.

Yet many of the actors consulted – both international and nationals - expressed **concern with this stance**, as it **reduces chance to reach CAAFAG children**. They are aware of the challenges, of the hard-core stance of AS. They are aware that some areas will continue to remain off-limits. Yet they are also **mindful about the risk of positioning on one side** and on the **missed opportunity** to at least try to **reach out for children** or **advocate for their rights**. CAAFAG concerns - recruitment in particular - are probably one of the hardest issues to deal with AS, given the investment in recruitment by the group. It is hard to imagine a way forward, but the concern expressed is a legitimate one, needing consideration.

Operating in the grey area

The **programme has already demonstrated capacity to operate in the grey area** existing in between Government / AS.

Government control

THE GREY AREA

Al Shabaab control

- **The grey area is a physical area:** of shifting frontlines, of population movements. An area where families might be divided: where some had to stay with their means of subsistence, other can seek sanctuary elsewhere (and it is often the youngest who are sent out: to escape recruitment, to earn livelihoods).
- **The grey area is, above all, a social one.** It is generated by the ramifications of existing institutions: governmental ones (e.g., NISA and MoIS) and, above all, Somali traditional institutions, such as the clan, which might include and connect people of diverse allegiances. Some children enter the system once captured in fighting. But many were identified and accompanied to supporting institutions within this grey area.

The understanding of **Government vs Al Shabaab control** emerging gets more nuanced when closer to the ground, or when engaging people with connections with the grassroots. The grey area is of course a very challenging space, hard to thread and very risky. But it is also the most interesting space for humanitarian protection, as it opens the possibility of dialogue, mediation, support.

Notwithstanding the risk and the challenges of operating in the grey zone, this is the area which will have the major potential if the programme is to **strengthen its preventive side**. Yet is an area to access with extreme care and sensitivity given the risk it poses to operate there. And this is the area that the humanitarian space

In other theatres of ongoing conflict, international organizations had been able to **reclaim the humanitarian space and advocate for CAAFAG rights** with all parties. But this **has not been the case in Somalia**. As it is now, **thousands of children are beyond reach**. The programme alone cannot create this space. **Reclaiming the humanitarian space is a political decision**, it depends on the stance of the international / humanitarian actors. **The programme alone has no room for manoeuvre. But it is certainly indicating the need and the urgency to find avenues to claim the humanitarian space.**

Key learning

- **The programme engaged many, diverse stakeholders, at different levels.** This is leading towards a complex institutional architecture, linking diverse government departments with community-level institutions and actors. Shaping this will require working on different fronts (e.g., accountability on roles and responsibilities, coordination, liaison, value sharing) as highlighted in the report.

- **How are children rebuilding connections?** Rebuilding connections is what reintegration is what about. The programme had emphasized so far mainly the community-side efforts in rebuilding connections. It is however important to acknowledge the many ways in which child are also rebuilding connections: amongst themselves, with their institutions, with hosting communities. And consider how to strengthen these ties: so that they are nurtured with love and care - strengthening the emotional side. But to also with stronger investment on citizenship, and related issues of responsibility, accountability.
- **The project has a lot to share.** Learning thrives on sharing. This project has a lot to share, but so far sharing learning was limited. Interest for sharing practices is now emerging (across implementing partners, within the region) to be fostered.
- **The risk of taking one side.** In many complex crisis theatre, protection programme managed to have relations with all sides. This is not the case in Somalia, where the humanitarian space UNICEF can operate within is very restricted by political choices. Notwithstanding challenges in doing so, several stakeholder caller for initiating dialogue on CAAFAG across the sides. Given the capacity that the project has demonstrated to “operated in the grey zone” possibilities might exist.

Diversity, equity, inclusion



Evaluate how transformational engagement manifests the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion together.

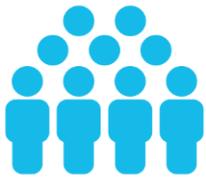
- Evaluate whether, how, and to what extent transformational engagement enhances systems-level diversity, equity, and inclusion.

This project is, at its core, about inclusion: helping to safely reintegrate CAAFAG within communities, in safer areas. Inclusion is challenging and might be resisted, on both sides: 1) on the children side (because when children are radicalized, they are groomed to believe that the hosting community will be hostile); 2) on the hosting community side (because they might fear or stigmatize CAAFAG children -and not even see them as children in the first place). The project seems to have managed so far to navigate these challenges. These inclusion aspects have been already illustrated in relation to → [Interconnectedness Momentum](#)~~Interconnectedness Momentum~~. This section will now focus on diversity.

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Diversity of CAAFAG children.

The programme is catering for diverse children, but it is struggling to capture this, and to “put a face” to them. Narratives of the programme oscillate in between 1) looking generically at “CAAFAG children” 2) sharing micro “human stories” (centre have personal files and track individual progress). What is missing is the middle ground.



Generic “CAAFAG”

Reference is made to “CAAFAG” children, as if they were a uniform group. Data disaggregation might provide some information about the population, but the diverse experiences of diverse groups are not explored. Broad brush narrative describes outcomes focusing mostly on the “services provided” to the whole population, with a project perspective.



Typologies of children

The focus is on “types, categories” of children with common characteristics. Their experience is tracked to capture common trends in the reintegration process. Characterization of “personae” is functional to “human centred design: designing services, support from the users. This is the perspective now missing in the programme.



Individual children

The focus is on individuals, an on their personal story. Human interest stories tend to capture successful outcomes or to illustrate specific aspects of the programme. It is often not clear if and how they are representative, and on what groups. Human interest stories are occasionally used by the programme, but there are really sketchy.

Lack of appreciation of diversity (in reporting in formal communication, in proposals) is a missed opportunity to describe programme challenges and options. Understanding better this the middle ground will help to 1) better describe achievements of the programme and 2) better structure response: who are the “clients” of the programme? What are their different needs, aspiration, potential? How can the programme be better tailored to them?



Recognize diversity across children (and define personae)

The children served by the programme are diverse, across a vast range of factors. Factors include the usual demographics (gender, age, origin, education...), socio-economic factors, as well as their different experience of conflict (e.g., allegiances, direct involvement in conflict, abuses experienced)- All these factors define different levels of vulnerability and risks (including risks of recidivism).

- **Capacity of programme to capture diversity is limited.** Carers in the centres are aware of the individual stories of children and of their diversity. They can cater for them. However, their programme cannot effectively outline what groups of children is serving, how.
- **Define personae.** A persona is a composite character that represent a group. The first step is to define personae is understanding what the most relevant groupings could be. These

typologies can then be humanized, as a fictional character, and used as a reference in planning, monitoring, discussions. More information about how personae can be used in practice, for planning and M&E will be provided in the → companion resource.



Recognize that diverse personae will have different pathways.

Diversity calls for tailored support. This is already happening in the practice: implementing partners are aware of the individual needs of the children they serve. Can this expertise be better consolidated? What are the likely pathway children will go through?

- **Different personae, different pathways.** Diverse typologies of children will have different needs. Their pathways will be different: for example, different length of support, different referrals, different options for guardianship and follow up.
- **Outlining support packages help to better structure assistance.** Outlining likely support packages (rather than trying to compress everything on the same one) will have many positive effects. Assistance can be better streamlined. Effectiveness better achieved. For example: should the programme be a “two tracks” one? There could be faster, lower investment tracks for less at-risk people. And more resource intensive ones for children with a higher risk profile. This type of considerations can support better planning, allocation of resources, development of capacities.
- **Different personae will have different risk profiles.** Assessing the risk profile (e.g., of recidivism, of disenfranchisement, of stigma) of personae can go a long way in: 1) increasing sustainability of the programme (with more effective risk management) and 2) supporting resilience of children (ensuring that these most at risk can be better supported and followed up in the long term. This is still a gap in the programme.
- **Outlines should be derived from experience.** Outlining pathways requires consolidation of the experience so far. What were the trends for this group of children? What challenges they were likely to encounter? M&E systems, however, are not yet suited to process the needed evidence.
- **Embrace human-centred design:** Personae are vastly used to better customize experiences. In marketing, for example. And are at the core of human centred design [[link](#)]. It is about designing solutions fit for children and their communities, by putting yourself in their shoes - rather than asking them to adapt to a project. Full participation in project design by children is probably still far-fetched. But more involvement of children and communities in feedback mechanisms and accountability/learning initiative is certainly a possibility. Even the simple act of “shifting perspective” – of asking “how does the project look from the perspective of the child” might open new possibilities.
- **Can diversity become a challenge?** The programme should always remain aware of potential tensions amongst children. For example: is there a chance that children recruited / loyal to diverse factions will be together in centres? The implementing partners did not mention challenges in this respect but suggested that operating on a regional basis might reduce likely challenges of integration amongst children.



Ensure diversity of opportunities

Diversity of skills, interests, potential of children should also translate into diversity of opportunities offered to them. And children could then become vectors of change and of new ideas. This point was already made re → [Transformational potential of children](#) Transformational potential of children. Given its importance, it is worth recalling here.

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Targeting challenges

How are children chosen to be part of the programme? There are several issues to be aware of, when looking at targeting challenges. The main two are 1) Children experienced different levels of exposure to risk and abuse. And 2) in the context of Somalia, where services and opportunities for children are limited, a quality programme might be an attractive resource for all. The interplay of them creates significant targeting challenges, that the programme is addressing.



Accounting for different risk levels in the selection process.

Exposure to risk varies. The programme covers a broad spectrum of children, from “former combatants” to “children at risk of conscription” (and different levels of risk might also be accompanied by different levels of abuses experienced). It is straightforward that former combatants should be enrolled in the programme. But, at the bottom end of the spectrum, it becomes hard to distinguish a low-risk child from a disadvantaged one.

- **Improvement in getting the high-risk children.** The high risk / exposure children are of course a priority for the programme. Such children are referred to the programme by armed forces or groups (from their screenings or because children were captured in operations). It

was very hard to get referrals at the inception, but the situation positively changed → [ReleaseRelease](#)

- **The blurred low-end.** *“this is the challenging part: ensuring that the partner have good selection processes process to identify the children associated with armed groups, rather than- for example - just generic IDPs”* Attempts to discuss “criteria” by successive projects made evident that criteria are not enough to understand if low-risk children should be supported by the programme. Assessment is mostly done by selection committees – with representation of government al local actors. They tend to operate quite informally, and it is not always easy to track adequately the rationale for the selection process. What could be the middle ground in between set criteria and loose discussions?
- **Selection process.** The importance of a good selection process (and the existing challenges for accountability) have already been presented re: community engagement [→ [Selection of children](#)]
- ~~Selection of children~~
-]
- **Level of risk/abuse is hard to assess. Yet it matters.** Checking the level of exposure to abuse and risk of CAAFAG is difficult. Keeping risk profiles would be sensitive (hence requiring safe M&E mechanisms and confidentiality measured). And exposure to risk is hard to assess in the first place! Abuse can often be hidden, even unlikely to surface (think, for example, about boys experiencing GBV, a society taboo). However, assessing– at least broadly! – risk amongst a cohort of children, would matter for accountability, for improving the effectiveness of interventions, to strengthen advocacy efforts to, of course, to better reach most at-risk children.

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Avoiding specific targeting of sensitive groups

The programme is aware that catering from former fighters – mainly AS – might create resentment in the community. Why are former fighters “awarded” with opportunities lacking in the community? As suggested by MHPSS in CAAFAG guidelines “programming must be careful to avoid specific targeting of sensitive groups, such as CAAFAG or survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, in line with the MHPSS core principle of ‘do no harm’. Specific targeting can result in increased societal stigma and further discrimination and exclusion of CAAFAG in communities, placing CAAFAG at risk of further harm, or it may reinforce divisions within a community. Specific targeting also runs the risk of causing inequities in service delivery where all children and families may have been affected by conflict”. Within the programme 20% of children should be vulnerable children from the host community.

- **What is the actual mix?** There were no disaggregated data to gauge the actual mix achieved in programmes. or information about selection criteria of community children.
- **Is diversity of circumstances calling for different packages?** In line with the discussion on tailoring, the programme should check: should packages for CAAFAG and host community children differ? If so, in what respect? And how to ensure that host children do not just get a “vocational training”, but a package that also make them actors of positive transformation and stronger reintegration? It is at this juncture that the programme might learn from peacebuilding approaches.
- **Fluid referrals.** The creation of a supportive ecosystem of referrals and support might ensure the needed fluidity of services: for CAAFAG children to transition to community services. And for highly vulnerable children to be selected as part of the reintegration programme when it would most beneficial for them.

MHPSS programming do's	MHPSS programming don'ts
Do work towards broad support and advocacy that promotes inclusion of all children and community members.	Don't specifically target sensitive groups through service delivery that excludes other children, or through programming that names or identifies sensitive groups.
Do provide MHPSS services equitably to all vulnerable children in affected communities.	Don't provide MHPSS services to former CAAFAG only and ignore children at risk of recruitment in conflict-affected situations.
Do implement additional approaches, interventions and steps to adequately recognize and mobilize MHPSS resources for CAAFAG in conflict-affected environments, and meet their needs through strengthening structures and referral resources that benefit the community at large.	Don't create divisions in access to specialized services that exclude children other than CAAFAG who are in need of referral.
Do monitor MHPSS programmes and improve non-targeted approach if CAAFAG become stigmatized through receiving services.	Don't provide MHPSS services in a way that makes the community resent service provision to CAAFAG, or in a way that the community may perceive as rewarding perpetrators of violence.

From: Resource Package: Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in CAAFAG Programmes [[link](#)]
 Getting the right mix of children remains a challenge. Some worry that the programme is still struggling to reach high risk/exposure children (but recognise that things are improving). Challenge in recruiting the “right” children could be however mitigated by a better customized and tailored assistance, balancing with effectiveness (serving more low-risk children with the same resources) what is lost with targeting. This is what seems to have happened looking at the indicators of the project. The push, however, should continuously be to refine targeting, and reaching the children in most distress.

Gender Issues and perspectives.

Getting a gender perspective on the programme requires considering diverse layers. They are outlined in the table, from the more superficial to the deeper ones.



Data disaggregation

The programme had systematically disaggregated indicators by sex. By its own nature it is targeting more boys, because recruitment/use involves disproportionately more boys than girls.



Monitoring violations

Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism tracked CAAFAG incidents (including conflict related rape and sexual violence). The programme helped to link survivors to support mechanisms. Tracking and follow up offered insights about the abuses suffered by girls: they are not recruited as combatants, but might support armed groups (e.g., as spies, by carrying goods). Many become wives for Al Shabab soldiers. As reported by the programme "with the exception of some bases in Jubaland (Kismayo region), most of these girls are never found on al-Shabaab bases, but live in towns, or also live with their parents while husbands are away".



Tailored experiences off/for girls and boys

The reintegration programme provides gender sensitive options (e.g., separate interim care centres, tailored offers for vocational training, GBV services etc.). Please note that:

- Gender sensitive programming matters but separated services might not always be the best way forward: Elman has successfully run mixed gender activities.
- As already pointed out re: → [Diversity of CAAFAG children](#) ~~Diversity of CAAFAG children~~, the programme poorly tracked and consolidated the experiences of children in the programmes. The specificities of girls' experience in the programme, their pathways need to be properly assessed and documented, to feed in the approaches proposed [→ [Capturing models of intervention](#) ~~Capturing models of intervention~~]

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Promoting integration in the centres

In the Elman centre, boys and girls attend the same training class: a great way to support integration. (some classes, understandably, remains segregated - e.g., yoga) This is not yet achieved in the Kismayo centre. The environment is more conservative, and there are not yet options for girls to engage in more traditionally male activities (they have a dedicated training in dyeing cloth) or to mix in the same class. Boys and girls, however, get training in the same centres, and reported informal moment of engagement. Capacity of partner to model – in ways sensitive to the context – healthy relations across boys and girls can be transformational.



Gender as root causes of CAAFAG abuses: toxic masculinity.

The drivers of CAAFAG abuses are, at their core, a product of toxic masculinity. Both boys and girls suffer because of structural aspects of patriarchal societies.

- **Ensure that awareness on CAAFAG and rehabilitation blends with awareness on patriarchal, discriminatory practices.** The programme has been addressing this in its awareness raising work: it has included messages to prevent GBV, FGM and other harmful norms. This is a sensitive but needed activity.
- **Invest in the transformative power of the programme.** Survivors and children formerly at risk might become the living demonstration that healthier gender dynamics are possible. This is in line with UNICEF protection strategy ambitions: “This programme is not gender responsive; it is actively progressive”. Provided, of course, that the programme helps children and communities to deactivate toxic masculinity aspects. The brief encounters with children in centres showed promising directions: boys honestly regretting previous aggressive behaviours. Boys and girls engaging in the same activities, on an equal ground. It is key that options for transformative gender dynamics – amongst children, within communities, and captured and shared in the programmes approaches.

The programme has the potential to address gender issues at the deepest: by **tackling toxic masculinity**. Remembering this matters: programme indicators, gender markers– which are the main channels through which gender work is tracked and reported on – do not capture, alone, the potential that reintegration programmes have in redressing structural patriarchy. Indicators and markers might even suggest that the programme is poorly serve women and girls, because there are less female direct beneficiaries. But dealing with gender is not simply about checking if a programme targeted a given % of women! The question is rather: is the programme helping communities to reconsider its own models, approaches, and contribute to reduce toxic masculinity? The programme had clearly started to acknowledge that recruitment, CAAFAG is rooted in discriminatory views and practices. Its implementing partners are also aware of this. The ambition of the programme should be to support communities and other programme stakeholders in appreciating this. The most powerful way to do so will be to ensure that the youth it serves – boys as well as girls - can become transformational agents of change for the whole community. This commitment should be strongly integrated in its → The programme “theory of change”: fit for purpose? The programme “theory of change”: fit for purpose? and in its → The emerging approach: the 5 pillars The emerging approach: the 5 pillars

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Key learning

- **The middle ground: typologies of children.** The programme has so far failed to capture the “middle ground”: identifying typologies of different children (that could be represented by “personae”) to better capture the different experiences of different groups of children. This middle ground could become a fertile field of action: to improve effectiveness, to better tailor experiences, to convey them effectively.
- **What is the right mix?** How are diverse children mixed in the programme? And what is the right mix, balancing the need for specificity of the programme (i.e. targeting CAAFAG) without alienating the community (i.e. also including disadvantaged children)? The programme has indications about the desired quota, but when looking at selection of children in the practice, things are not so straightforward. Revealing abuse, gauging risk, are challenging. And the answer does not lie in criteria, but on fluid, responsive, accountable processes of selection.
- **Think about gender issues in ambitious ways! Address toxic masculinity.** Gender is often addressed at its low end (disaggregation / quota), as requested by reporting formats. This might even become a distraction from the actual challenge ahead. The CAAFAG program in Somalia will always reach directly more boys. The challenge for this programme is to tackle gender at the high end: by tackling toxic masculinity. Is the process of reintegration a process that ultimately helps to reduce this deviant perception?

Where next?

The programme was **appreciated by all stakeholders contacted**. Many indicated that, despite all challenges, **in the recent years the programme really shifted gears**. Yet the **challenge ahead is still massive**, and the programme is aware that it **can do little to prevent recruitment** in Al Shabaab controlled areas.

The report so far has shared the trajectory of change – with related challenges and opportunities. It has **highlighted learning – as well as blind spots**. The way in which this report was written and built means that **practical, actionable points and ideas have been interspersed throughout** it. The evaluator was a facilitator, not an expert. The focus was never to offer big, general recommendations, but to rather **consolidate thinking, expertise learning as shared by the stakeholders**. To bring together the insights, the expertise, the understanding that had remained implicit. And to structure it in ways that can foster future rich conversations.

In lieu of recommendation, the evaluation will now offer questions. “Beautiful questions” help to guide future implementation by pointing to areas that matters. Evaluation consultants are not managers, and it would be counterproductive to believe that they have the contextual knowledge, experience, skillset to guide action and provide “the right answer” to very complex issues. But a good questions is the first step in pointing to directions, getting answer that matters.



How to further strengthen the institutional architecture?

The programme had made impressive progress in building a needed → Institutional architecture and support. National and local actors are better connected. Stronger platforms, protocols, policies, legislation exist. The programme has overall clarity of future direction, and aware that advocacy will be needed to achieve them. Questions for better strengthening institutional architecture included:

- *What are possibilities, the weakest links, and the needed area for investment?*
- *What local adaptations will be needed?* For example, is the institutional architecture equally responsive in all regions? Will it need to adapt to local setups (e.g., because of the involvement of different actors, such as regional militia)? This will be an increasingly important question, as the programme seeks to expand its coverage.
- *How to best tailor the architecture for the needs of diverse children?* The architecture now refers generically to “CAAFAG” children: how to make it more responsive to the needs of diverse *personae*? [→ Diversity of CAAFAG children.]
- *How will handover happen?* It might be far stretched now, but anticipating options might give better clues on priority investment for capacities and support (which might involve a considerable time-lag before materializing).



Can the programme broaden its advocacy?

Looking at the programme with → A risk management mindset, to build meaningful resilience. revealed that its preventive side is still weak. Despite considerable advances, it is just scratching the surface. Recruitment is still a major issue, in Al Shabaab controlled areas. Many programme stakeholders believe that – despite policy restrictions – advocacy towards Al Shabaab will be needed. The programme also demonstrated the existence of at least a “grey area”, where it is possible to intervene.

- *How can the programme improve its capacity to operate in the grey area?* [→ Operating in the grey area]
- *Could it eventually led to pilot options for advocacy to reach all parties in conflict?* [→ The risk of taking one side]



How can the programme best demonstrate value?

Demonstrating value is an imperative, and the programme is aware of this: “unless UNICEF and its partners can continue to demonstrate and advocate the efficacy of our reintegration programme, there is a risk that the Somali people, and the Somali government, may agitate for a more punitive approach to the handling of former CAAFAG.”

The programme also needs to capture value to avoid that many of the knowledge produced is not capitalized on. Investment on this is starting (the documentation of the “5 pillar approach”). But much more needs to be understood, documented and shares.

Throughout the report it has been stressed that the M&E systems in place are not up to the challenge. They now demand a massive investment on reporting, but with minimal effectiveness in capturing meaningful change, and in valuing knowledge.

Offering questions for action in this context would have not been enough. This is why a → companion “[Ideas for a M&E framework](#)” was added to this report.



How to best reach out and engage communities?

Support to children in centres is being supported, sustained. The next “black box” to explore is likely to be community engagement. The evaluation showed that – little documented, under the radar – community level work is the engine of the programme. Several mechanisms are now in place (liaison, guardianship, referral...). It is largely evolving by doing

- How does it work? [→ Relations amongst local actors]
- As the programme expand, how to best ensure that it can be replicated and adapted?



Can children be active, transformational actors, not just recipients?

The report stressed throughout the importance to put children at the centre, and as *active* actors.

- *How to support their resilience?* [→ Resilience]
 - *How to shift human-centred-design project approaches? How to strengthen accountability to them?* (allowing them to have a say about the services they receive; about the process they are involved into) [→ Diversity of CAAFAG children.]
 - *How to ensure that also hosting community can see children as active actors?* (building citizenships, not just tolerance) [→ Children: relations amongst them and with their community]
 - *How to tap into their potential to transform society?* (ensuring that children can be carriers of diverse options, be role models, and examples of the need to overcome toxic masculinity)? [→ The eco-power: CAAFAG vs. environmental concerns → Gender issues and perspectives. Gender issues and perspectives.]
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