

# Access to reparation for children affected by conflict-related sexual violence **in 7 questions**

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Sexual violence is used as a weapon of war in almost every conflict and affects both young children and adolescents. The impact of sexual violence on children<sup>1</sup> is profound, long-lasting, and multidimensional. While they face similar physical, psychological and socioeconomic consequences to adults, their age, physical size, developmental stage and social environment lead to a multitude of additional distinct harms.

Sexual violence disrupts their education, causes long-lasting emotional and psychological distress, hampers their social integration, and jeopardises their futures and overall well-being. Children therefore require urgent comprehensive reparation programmes tailored to their specific needs, yet most do not receive any during their lifetimes.

## **I. Who are the children affected by conflict-related sexual violence?**

Children affected by conflict-related sexual violence form a diverse yet largely invisible community. In some contexts, they are the majority of sexual violence victims. An overall estimate of children affected by conflict-related sexual violence worldwide is unknown, but in 2021, Save the Children estimated that 72 million children were living in a conflict zone where sexual violence against children had been reported, a number which has increased nearly tenfold since 1990.<sup>2</sup>

It is essential to adopt a broad definition of children as "affected" by conflict-related sexual violence. Survivors themselves suggest referring to the following four categories of children affected by sexual violence to be considered for reparation:<sup>3</sup>

1. Children subjected to sexual violence;
2. Children born of rape;
3. Children who have witnessed sexual violence;
4. Children whose caregivers have suffered sexual violence.

 *Our children are destroyed.  
A new generation that saw what  
was done to their parents cannot forget.*<sup>4</sup>

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1. A child is any person under the age of 18, as defined by [the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

2. Save The Children, "Weapon of War: Sexual Violence Against Children in Conflict", (2021), p 3, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/weapon-of-war-report-final.pdf/>.

3. See in particular the Kinshasa declaration on the rights to reparation and co-creation of survivors and victims of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence: [https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Kinshasa\\_Declaration/GSF\\_Kinshasa\\_Declaration\\_EN\\_Nov2022\\_WEB\\_1\\_.pdf](https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Kinshasa_Declaration/GSF_Kinshasa_Declaration_EN_Nov2022_WEB_1_.pdf).

4. Mariana Goetz and others, 'Study on the situation and opportunities of the right to reparation for victims and survivors of Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Kenya', (Grace Agenda, Global Survivors Fund and Civil Society Organisation Network, May 2023), (GRS Kenya), p. 28, [https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global\\_Reparation\\_Studies/GSF\\_Report\\_KENYA\\_EN\\_May2023\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/GSF_Report_KENYA_EN_May2023_WEB.pdf).

## II. What is the impact of conflict-related sexual violence on children?



*Many of us women were not able to continue with our daily lives because we were very young when this happened to us. Our childhood and adolescence were very difficult because some of us were raped and had children, so we had to stop our childhood and start raising another child.<sup>5</sup>*

### 1. Physical and mental health issues

The physical impact of sexual violence can be devastating for children. It causes reproductive, urinary and digestive system problems, including infections, chronic pain, fistula, sterility, incontinence and, in the most serious cases, death.<sup>6</sup> Girls who become pregnant after having been raped are at greater risk of maternal mortality or morbidity because their bodies are not sufficiently developed to bear children.<sup>7</sup> Children born of conflict-related sexual violence also suffer from diverse health problems associated with the circumstances of their conception, including HIV<sup>8</sup> and health conditions believed to originate from unsuccessful abortion attempts.<sup>9</sup>



*We have got children who have had a disability because some of them are meant to be aborted. And then the abuse of the abortion backfired. And then the child came out with a disability or with a limitation.<sup>10</sup>*

Children also experience severe psychological trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, somatic disorders, intense feelings of rage and shame, self-blame, memory loss and nightmares.<sup>11</sup> Many of these symptoms overlap and can have long-term effects on their overall development, including the ability to form meaningful relationships with others as adults. This can extend to poor relationships with their own children in the future.<sup>12</sup> For women and girls who become pregnant, it can be challenging to separate the child from the traumatic circumstances of their conception, leading to difficulties in forming a loving bond.



*I face my biggest nightmare every day every time I see my daughter. I don't like her because she reminds me every day of the rape I suffered, and my life which was ruined.<sup>13</sup>*

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5. Clara Sandoval Villalba and others, 'Study on the situation and opportunities of the right to reparation for victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual and reproductive violence in Colombia', (Asociación de Mujeres Afrodescendientes del Norte del Cauca, Caribe Afirmativo, Genfami and Global Survivors Fund, June 2022), (GRS Colombia), p. 37, [https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global\\_Reparation\\_Studies/GSFReportColombia\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/GSFReportColombia_ENG.pdf).

6. Save The Children (2021), p. 17.

7. Save The Children "Unspeakable Crimes against Children – Sexual Violence in Conflict Save the Children", (2013), p. 16.

8. United Nations Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary General on Women and girls who become pregnant as a result of sexual violence in conflict and children born of sexual violence in conflict', doc S/2022/77, (31 January 2022), (UN Security Council doc S/2022/77), p. 7, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/report/auto-draft/N2223437.pdf>.

9. Kimberly Thiedon, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Children born of wartime sexual violence', (2015), p. 3, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/epdf/10.1086/683301>, accessed November 2023.

10. GRS Kenya, p. 33.

11. Save The Children (2021), p. 16.

12. Ibid.

13. Study on the Status and Opportunities for Reparations for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Burundi (Global Survivors Fund and Light for All), [Forthcoming].

## 2. Stigmatisation

Children affected by sexual violence often face stigmatisation and discrimination because of the nature of the violence, often tied into unequal gender norms. They may also be rejected by their families and communities, hindering the child's ability to speak out and seek help and support.<sup>14</sup> The impact of this stigma continues into adulthood.<sup>15</sup>



*We have got children who have had a disability because some of them are meant to be aborted. And then the abuse of the abortion backfired. And then the child came out with a disability or with a limitation.*<sup>16</sup>

For children born of sexual violence, including those born in captivity, additional stigma comes from being considered as 'children of the enemy.'<sup>17</sup> This is illustrated in many countries by name-calling,<sup>18</sup> such as "paraquitos" (little paramilitaries) in Colombia, and "rebel's child" or "jihadist's child" in Mali. Children who have different phenotypic traits to others in their community may face increased levels of stigmatisation<sup>19</sup> and are at a higher risk of neglect, violence, exploitation and abuse.

## 3. Interrupted education and economic hardship

Conflict is widely recognised as one of the biggest factors that disrupts children's access to education globally.<sup>20</sup> For children affected by conflict-related sexual violence, the challenges are further exacerbated. Many are forced to abandon school due to being held in captivity, while displacement, a lack of legal documents (see *infra*) or the need to support their families prevent others from resuming their studies. Physical and mental health issues, stigmatisation and bullying further hinder their ability to re-integrate into the classroom. A lack of adequate educational pathways compound the economic consequences of social and family rejection. This can have long-term impacts, lead to extreme poverty, and expose victims to further exploitation, including sexual exploitation or recruitment by armed groups.



*I couldn't study due to the incident. Had I been able to continue my studies, I could have been financially independent now. I wouldn't have to face the situation that I faced in the past, nor the situation that I am facing now.*<sup>21</sup>

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14. Save The Children (2021), p. 17.

15. GRS Timor-Leste, p. 32.

16. Marianne Akumu and others, 'Uganda Study on Opportunities for Reparations for Survivors of Conflict-related Sexual Violence', (Global Survivors Fund, International Center for Transitional Justice and Women's Advocacy Network, May 2022), (GRS Uganda), p. 30,

[https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global\\_Reparation\\_Studies/GSF\\_Report\\_Uganda\\_EN\\_May2022\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/GSF_Report_Uganda_EN_May2022_WEB.pdf).

17. LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, Joanne Neenan, 'Closing the protection gap for children born of war, Addressing stigmatisation and the intergenerational impact of sexual violence in conflict', (2017), (Joanne Neenan (2017)), p. 11, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/assets/documents/2018/LSE-WPS-Children-Born-of-War.pdf>.

18. UN Security Council doc S/2022/77, p. 6.

19. UN Security Council doc S/2022/77, p. 6.

20. Save the Children, "Rewrite the Future: Education for Children in Conflict-Affected Countries" (2006), p. 5.

21. Elena Naughton and Dr. Susan Risal, 'Nepal Study on the Status of and Opportunities for Reparations for Victims and Survivors of Conflict-related Sexual Violence', (Conflict Victim Women's National Network, Global Survivors Fund, International Center for Transitional Justice and Nagarik Aawaz, June 2022), (GRS Nepal), p. 50, [https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global\\_Reparation\\_Studies/GSF\\_Report\\_Nepal\\_EN\\_June2022\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/GSF_Report_Nepal_EN_June2022_WEB.pdf).

## 4. Transgenerational harm

The effects of sexual violence can be felt over several generations, creating a vicious cycle of trauma. Challenges faced by survivors are likely to be passed on to their children,<sup>22</sup> who may suffer the same social exclusion, discrimination, and economic hardship as their parents. This transgenerational harm was defined by the International Criminal Court (ICC) as a phenomenon, *whereby social violence is passed on from ascendants to descendants with traumatic consequences for the latter. It is characterised by the existence of an intergenerational cycle of dysfunction that traumatised parents set in motion, handing-down trauma by acting as violent and neglectful caretakers deforming the psyche and impacting the next generation. (...) This affects their children's emotional behaviour, attachment, and well-being, increasing the risk that they will suffer post-traumatic stress disorders, mood disorders, and anxiety issues.*<sup>23</sup>

Trauma can be passed down both physically and socially. In neuropsychiatry, the epigenetic transmission theory suggests parents pass down genetic markers to their children that retain a memory of traumatic events. The social transmission theory focuses instead on the impact of upbringing and emotional learning on the child's emotional development. Both theories apply regardless of the date when the children were born.



*Children also are impacted by the violence suffered by the family. Many times, it affects the mother's mental health so much that the children end up also being affected.*<sup>24</sup>

### Lack of legal identity

For children born of conflict-related sexual violence, additional challenges can arise from a lack of legal identity and nationality. Legal, administrative, and practical barriers, including gender discrimination, combined with psychological, social, and economic difficulties, often prevent children born of conflict-related sexual violence from being registered at birth.<sup>25</sup> For instance, it is difficult for children born of conflict-related sexual violence in Syria to obtain nationality or citizenship as only men can pass their nationality to their children.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the stigma and trauma associated with the violence often leads to strained mother-child relationships. Some reject their children, further complicating the process of birth registration. Without a legal identity, their access to justice and reparation, as well as to other fundamental rights, including access to education, health and social protection, is severely hindered. It leads to increased vulnerability, exclusion, discrimination, stigmatisation, abuse and exploitation.<sup>27</sup> For this reason, GSF advocates with all stakeholders to prioritise access to legal identity for children born of conflict-related sexual violence as a form of reparation, recognising it as a gateway to their dignity, rights, and access to essential services.

22. Joanne Neenan (2017), p. 9.

23. Ntaganda Reparations Order, ICC-01/04-02/06-2659, para. 73.

24. Testimony from a survivor from Colombia collected as part of the GRS.

25. GSF, 'Outcome Report, Expert roundtable on children born of conflict-related sexual violence Breaking down barriers to accessing the rights to identity and nationality', (June 2023), [https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Policy Briefs/Outcome report roundtable children born of CRSV March24 web.pdf](https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Policy%20Briefs/Outcome%20report%20roundtable%20children%20born%20of%20CRSV%20March24%20web.pdf).

26. Legislative Decree 276 (1969), Syrian Nationality Law, article 3, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4d81e7b12.pdf>.

27. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 'Birth registration and armed conflict' (2007), p.27 <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/insight-br-eng.pdf>.

### III. What is the right to reparation of children affected by conflict-related sexual violence ?

Under international law, victims of gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including children affected by conflict-related sexual violence, have a right to adequate, effective and prompt reparation. This includes restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.<sup>28</sup> The right to reparation of children was further recognised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its General Comment No.5 in line with Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>29</sup> which states that “*where rights are found to have been breached, there should be appropriate reparation, including compensation, and, where needed, measures to promote physical and psychological recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration*”.

In his 2014 Guidance Note on Reparations for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, the United Nations Secretary-General recognised that victims of conflict-related sexual violence include persons who, individually or collectively, suffered such violence, but also family members, such as children, including children born of such violence, and other dependents, as well as persons that intervened to assist victims in distress or to prevent victimisation.<sup>30</sup> Survivors themselves called in the [Kinshasa Declaration](#) for their children, including those born of conflict-related sexual violence, to be “*included in reparation processes and their specific needs addressed appropriately*” and stressed that they are entitled to “*victim-centred, transformative and gender-responsive reparations in their own right*”.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, despite reparation being a right and a priority for children affected by conflict-related sexual violence, most do not receive any during their lifetime. Their specific rights and needs are almost entirely overlooked in reparation initiatives worldwide<sup>32</sup> that would serve their immediate and long-term wellbeing, including for those who are now adults.



Lafiya Sarari school, Maiduguri, Nigeria, February 2024 © Onafuwa/ UNICEF

28. United Nations, Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law (2005), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-and-guidelines-right-remedy-and-reparation#:~:text=In%20accordance%20with%20its%20domestic,violations%20of%20international%20humanitarian%20law.>

29. Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.5 General measures of implementation of the convention on the rights of the child (2003).

30. UN Secretary-General, Guidance Note of the Secretary-General: Reparations for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (2014).

31. Kinshasa Declaration (2022), p.2.

32. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Children and Reparation: Past lessons and new directions, 2010, p.v.

## IV. What are the challenges faced by children affected by conflict-related sexual violence to access reparations?

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Governments, because of their lack of awareness, capacity or commitment, rarely recognise children affected by conflict-related sexual violence as victims eligible for reparations. When reparation programmes do exist, some categories of children are left out, and programmes often fail to include forms of reparation tailored to their needs. For example, Iraq's 2021 Yazidi Female Survivor's Law was enacted to provide a reparation framework for survivors of the violence perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), but it excludes children born of conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, a few countries, such as Colombia<sup>34</sup> have recognised children born of rape as victims and included them in the scope of their reparation programme,<sup>35</sup> a promising step forward.

Children affected by conflict-related sexual violence face additional challenges when seeking access to reparation, as the issues arising from being a victim of sexual violence are compounded by the unique circumstances of being a child.

### 1. Legal and bureaucratic barriers

Children are often required to navigate convoluted legal and administrative procedures, with burdensome requirements to register as victims and receive reparation. They also face challenges related to costs, lengthy proceedings, and poorly structured, inadequate, and unclear reparation programmes. Moreover, reparation mechanisms may not be child-specific or child-friendly. They may even be discriminatory towards children or specific groups of children, and exclude them from accessing reparation measures.<sup>36</sup> Children may also be unaware of their rights or cannot obtain essential information on accessing reparations in a child-friendly format.

### 2. Stigma, discrimination and ostracisation

The stigma, discrimination and ostracisation faced by children affected by conflict-related sexual violence lead to shame, secrecy and reluctance to seek remedies and reparation. There is often a lack of empathy and understanding within communities about children's trauma and needs.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, insecurity, fear of retaliation, safety concerns, and a lack of trust in national authorities severely hinder their access to reparation. Communities must be educated on the rights of child survivors and the importance of reparations in their healing process. Strategies must also be established to enable victims to come forward safely and confidentially.

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33. Amnesty, 'Iraq: Yazidi reparations law progress welcome, but more must be done to assist survivors', 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/iraq-yezidi-reparations-law-progress-welcome-but-more-must-be-done-to-assist-survivors/#:~:text=On%201%20March%202021%2C%20the.before%20the%20age%20of%2018>.

34. Law 1448, 'Victims and Land Restitution Law' (10 June 2011), art. 181, <https://www.suin-juriscol.gov.co/viewDocument.asp?ruta=Leyes/1680697>.

35. GSF, 'Briefing on Reparation for Children Born of Conflict-related sexual violence: Exploring survivors' perspectives from the Global Reparations Study' (2024), (GSF Briefing (2024)), [https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Policy\\_Briefs/Briefing\\_on\\_children\\_born\\_of\\_CRSV\\_web\\_Final.pdf](https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Policy_Briefs/Briefing_on_children_born_of_CRSV_web_Final.pdf).

36. Ton Liefwaard, 'Access to Justice for Children: Towards a Specific Research and Implementation Agenda' (2019) 27, International Journal of Children's Rights p. 203.

37. GSF Briefing (2024).

### 3. Administrative reparation over judicial reparation

Too often, the only path to reparation is through judicial proceedings. However, reparations that can be solely accessed through courts pose additional challenges for survivors, in particular for children. Many are prevented from accessing such measures as they are denied legal assistance or are unable to represent themselves. This can be especially problematic in the case of a conflict of interest between a child and their parents or caregiver. Prioritising administrative reparation programmes over judicial reparation would benefit a larger number of child victims with minimal formality and child-friendly procedures.

### 4. Enabling factors

Before children affected by conflict-related sexual violence can access reparation, several critical steps must be taken to ensure they are physically and emotionally capable of engaging in reparation processes. Urgent medical care, including access to sexual and reproductive health services, is paramount to address physical injuries or health complications. Alongside this, psychological support must be provided to help children process their trauma. Survivors must also be able to access child-friendly practical information on services and allowances available to them, including specific services for victims with additional vulnerabilities.



*At times, we tend to overlook their needs. I firmly believe that there exists a significant responsibility towards them. It is crucial to formulate plans, strategies, care initiatives, and reparations, as they are an integral part of our reality, our households, and our community. They are human beings entitled to rights and deserving of our attention.*<sup>38</sup>

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38. Testimony from a survivor from Colombia collected as part of the GRS.

## V. What are survivors' priorities for reparations?

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Because children affected by conflict-related sexual violence face distinct challenges, reparation must be tailored and respond to their specific needs and priorities. Through its work, GSF identified the following reparation priorities.<sup>39</sup> The following list is non-exhaustive and does not include other, more traditional forms of reparation, such as financial compensation. In every case, they must be designed with survivors and victims and adapted to suit the needs of children entitled to reparation.

### 1. Access to education

In GSF's work around the world, education-related measures are frequently mentioned as a priority and desired form of reparation for victims. However, education systems require significant changes to be accessible to children affected by sexual violence and address their mental, physical, economic and social needs.

### 2. Access to medical and psychological healthcare

Given the severity of the abuse suffered, children affected by conflict-related sexual violence should have access to adequate and timely mental and physical health services. If left unaddressed, trauma and mental health conditions can lead to depression, violence or drug and alcohol dependency.<sup>40</sup> A survivor in Kenya stressed that her son "*acts like a time bomb waiting to explode*" as she described the effects of untreated trauma on her child who was born of sexual violence.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. Community acceptance and inclusion

Survivors emphasise that reparation programmes should address taboos through raising awareness on the impacts of war.<sup>42</sup> Addressing stigmatisation and discrimination at the community level, including in schools, is crucial to ensure respectful treatment of children affected by conflict-related sexual violence. For example, survivors from Timor-Leste have shared that "*small-scale NGO programmes in their communities have made a difference to the social attitudes of stigmatisation and victim-blaming.*"<sup>43</sup> Survivor networks and women-led organisations also play a key role through targeted policy and advocacy support at global, regional and national levels, including fostering peer support and solidarity networks.

### 4. Collective and symbolic measures

The ICC's 2023 Policy on Children stressed that "*appropriate reparations may include collective reparations with an individual component, including non-monetary awards such as apologies, education grants, and child support*".<sup>44</sup> Such symbolic and collective measures could also include commemoration initiatives, changing the names of public spaces, and the creation of museums, parks, or memorials dedicated to children.

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39. GSF, 'Briefing on Reparation for Children Born of Conflict-related sexual violence'.

40. UN Security Council doc S/2022/77, p. 7.

41. GRS Kenya, p.19.

42. Kinshasa Declaration (2022), p. 3.

43. 'Timor-Leste Study on the Status and Opportunities for Reparations for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence', (Asia Justice and Rights, Assosiasaun Chega! Ba Ita and Global Survivors Fund, December 2023), p. 32,

[https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global\\_Reparation\\_Studies/Report\\_Timor-Leste\\_Dec2023\\_EN\\_Web.pdf](https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/Report_Timor-Leste_Dec2023_EN_Web.pdf).

44. International Criminal Court, Policy on Children, 2023, p.58.

## Education as a form of reparation

Education as a form of reparation offers a pathway from trauma to recovery, economic empowerment, social reintegration and recognition.

Trauma-responsive education that considers victims' emotional and psychological needs, and engages caregivers and communities, is crucial to the healing and recovery of children affected by conflict-related sexual violence. A supportive school environment helps rebuild shattered self-esteem, offers a safe space for emotional recovery, and provides a sense of belonging. Beyond healing, education offers survivors with knowledge and skills, opening pathways to economic independence.

Education is also essential to long-term peacebuilding. Many victims who drop out of school are isolated and stigmatised, leaving them vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. Investing in education breaks this cycle, reintegrating children into society and opening doors to economic opportunities that can secure a brighter future.

GSF's approach in interim reparative measures (IRM) projects combines trauma-responsive education with economic support. This addresses barriers such as tuition fees, books, and access to food, in addition to psychological problems and lack of family support.

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*I want to resume school because if I finish school and graduate, then Boko Haram will not have won. I will then be the winner.*<sup>45</sup>



A student's notebook in Lafiya Sarari school, Maiduguri, Nigeria, February 2024 © Onafuwa UNICEF

45. Testimony from a survivor from Nigeria collected as part of the GRS.

## VII. How to design and implement adequate reparation for children affected by conflict-related sexual violence?

For children to effectively access reparation, it is critical to establish mechanisms that recognise and address their specific needs and challenges. This involves ensuring that processes are:

- child-sensitive and compliant with their best interests;
- child-friendly, including by guaranteeing that children are well informed of their rights during the course of proceedings;
- gender-sensitive and age-appropriate, as children's needs evolve significantly depending on their gender, age and abilities. For children nearing adulthood, for example, accelerated schooling or advanced technical training are often more appropriate. Reparation programmes must also include persons affected as children that have reached adulthood;
- accessible and confidential;
- implemented in a trauma-responsive manner, with specialised support services such as trauma-informed counselling;
- addressing further discrimination, stigmatisation or ostracisation. The emotional well-being, safety and security of children must be safeguarded at all times, including by implementing preventive measures to reduce the risk of further harm or re-victimisation. Singling out certain victims as entitled to special measures can lead to further stigmatisation and discrimination if they are not designed and implemented sensibly. They can also result in community backlash against child victims.<sup>46</sup> Mitigating measures include the provision of collective and symbolic forms of reparation and the inclusion of all children of survivors or the wider community in programmes.

### Children's rights to participation

In line with Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), children should be enabled to participate in every stage of the reparation process, including in the design and implementation of reparation programmes. Consultation with children is not enough. Children must fully and effectively participate in reparation processes to increase ownership and to ensure that reparation has its intended impact, as they are best placed to identify their needs. The active participation of children in reparation processes also has a reparative value in itself, by recognising victims as right-holder. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child defined a set of requirements which should be respected to guarantee children's effective, ethical and meaningful participation. In particular, the process should be transparent and informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant, child friendly, inclusive, supported by training, safe, sensitive to risk and accountable.<sup>47</sup>

46. Mazurana, D., & Carlson, K., "Reparations as a Means for Recognizing and Addressing Crimes and Grave Rights Violations against Girls and Boys during Situations of Armed Conflict and under Authoritarian and Dictatorial Regimes", in Rubio-Marín, R., (ed) *The Gender of Reparations: Unsettling Sexual Hierarchies while Redressing Human Rights Violations*, CUP (2009), p. 202.

47. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'General comment No. 12', (2009), para. 133–134, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/crc/2009/en/70207>.

## VIII. How does GSF work to enhance access to reparation for children affected by conflict-related sexual violence?

GSF works to ensure that children affected by conflict-related sexual violence are explicitly included in reparation policies and programmes through three key workstreams:

- GSF works towards the inclusion of children as a specific victim category, in both State-led reparation programmes and in its interim reparative measure projects. We work to ensure that such programmes are created and implemented with the full and effective participation of children in a gender-responsive and age-appropriate manner that safeguards their interests, challenges stigmatisation, and avoids re-traumatisation.
- We create knowledge and good practice around reparative measures and children's participation in reparation processes. Our work raises awareness of forms of reparation that would serve children's immediate and long-term needs, including for those who are now adults.
- Our advocacy work and technical support to governments increases awareness, knowledge and recognition of the specific rights and needs of children, and their participation in reparation processes.

GSF focuses on several thematic priorities:

- Education and livelihood training as a form of reparation;
- Full and effective participation in reparation processes;
- Access to legal identity and nationality for children born of rape;
- The prevention of stigmatisation and ostracisation of children by their families and communities.



