

Research Study

# Children in Armed Conflicts

**A Case Study on the Tribal Areas of Pakistan**

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October 2012

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# **Children in Armed Conflicts**

## **A Case Study on the Tribal Areas of Pakistan**

### **Section I Introduction**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Armed conflicts and violence in different parts of the world is heavily contributing in increasing the manifold suffering and hardships for the children. Children as direct consequences face physical injuries, death, and forced recruitment in armed forces and indirectly affected by displacement, loss of relatives and the trauma associated with witnessing acts of violence. Armed conflict has its greatest impact on the poorest communities in the poorest countries, and children and adolescents under age 18 are among the most severely affected in these communities. According to the United Nations, some 20 million people have been killed in over 150 armed conflicts in developing countries since the Second World War, the majority being women and children. According to Amnesty International, "Approximately 250,000 children under the age of 18 are thought to be fighting in conflicts around the world." Moreover, though many child soldiers are between ages 15 and 18, significant recruitment starting at age 10 and the use of even younger children has been recorded.

Armed conflict entails many transformations and hazards at the macro and micro levels, with major implications for children's survival, development, health and overall wellbeing. Some major impacts on children in armed conflict include Social Disruption, Loss of service access, Impoverishment, Civil and political violations, Threats to the physical integrity of the child, Transformations in children's roles and responsibilities and Differentials in children's vulnerabilities. In the immediate aftermath of exposure to violence children may endure a range of distressing physiological symptoms directly connected with extreme shock. Other longer term and highly pervasive reactions include depression, anxiety, inability to concentrate

at school and reluctance to interact socially with peers. Therefore, it is highly important for state institutions and civil society to take all necessary steps for the care and protection of children exposed to armed conflicts, violence, and displacement.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides a global charter for the protection of children's survival, development and well being. Under international law, the participation of children under 18 in armed conflict is generally prohibited, and the recruitment and use of children under 15 is a war crime. Armed conflict creates conditions under which many of the rights laid out in the CRC are undermined. The landmark 1996 Graca Machel/UNICEF report on "Children Affected by Armed Conflict" pointed out that war increases the threats to children and clearly contravenes the mandate for their protection laid out in the CRC. Therefore, it is the duty of aid agencies involved in preventative and emergency efforts to understand how children are affected by such adversities and to develop measures that mitigate the impact on children.

Children's rights can be protected by promoting leadership and accountability for violations of children's rights and by ensuring that internationally agreed standards of child protection become accepted throughout the region and are sustained during conflict. This entails lobbying, advocacy and information dissemination on general human/children's rights instruments, with a focus on principles and issues that are of particular relevance to war-affected children. There is need to promote the application of holistic and multidisciplinary approaches in the protection of children in conflict zone as such approaches allow comprehensive risk analysis, encompassing the whole range of children's vulnerabilities. Children are not considered in isolation; instead, their situation is analyzed holistically, taking into account the various factors that may affect their development and well-being. This is the basis of community- based support, which aims to strengthen existing resources around the child. Children protection program in conflict zone should emphasize on building the resilience of communities, encouraging active participation of youth, and promoting local ownership and sustainability of such programs.

Children in Pakistan continuously suffered from the prolonged armed conflicts throughout the history of the country. The border dispute with India over Kashmir has continued since 1947 due to which several generations of children in Azad Kashmir have been born into and grown up under the influence of violence and security threats. Similarly prolonged violent conflicts on western parts of the country heavily affected the millions of children living in the tribal and semi tribal areas of FATA, FRs, PATA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. Children in armed conflicts in various parts of Pakistan are physically, socially and economically affected. The adversities they experience include death, injuries, material impoverishment, the disruption of family relationships, loss of family members, displacement, lowering of status and social ostracism of their family. Children who experience violence may suffer the consequences for years to come. Children are threatened by the unpredictability of the violence, which can erupt at any time and in any place. Their exposure to violence is high and they themselves may become victims or perpetrators of attack.

The last 11 years continuing volatile conflict in FATA, and adjacent KP Province brought countless miseries to the millions of tribal children. The horrific violence and fighting has deeply affected the economic, social and emotional context in which tribal children were earlier living. Children have been killed and maimed throughout the conflict. They have been killed as their villages and communities were destroyed, they have been caught up in the crossfire, they have been directly targeted in retaliatory violence, subject to arbitrary killings and torture they have died as a result of hardship and neglect on refugee exoduses. The hundreds of Children were used as suicide bombers in which thousands of innocent civilians and children killed over the last decade. Children in such active war zones are familiar with the scenes of cruelty and violence. Despite the prevalence of high number of Pakistani children affected in the War against Terrorism there is no systematic data base as current records are fragmentary and anecdotal.

The Government of Pakistan is a signatory to the CRC. The government has accepted a mandate for and global accountability on the welfare of children throughout their country, irrespective

of whether these children live in an area of conflict not. There are, in addition, special provisions within the CRC for the care of conflict-affected children. The government in recent past has approved and enforced child protection policy for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan. The policy is aiming to promote and create a protective environment for all children which ensure their protection against all forms of violence, abuse, discrimination, neglect and exploitation. Child protection centers are being established in the war affected areas. However, it is quite evident that lack of technical, human, and financial resources are major impediments in the way of addressing the multiple problems associated with the protection and care of children in the entire tribal region. The role of civil society organizations operational in the war zone is quite vital in terms of bridging these gaps, strengthening the capacities of concerned public institutions and working with affected tribal communities on long term basis.

Community Mobilization and Development Organization (CMDO) over the last decade is actively working on children affected by armed conflicts in FATA and KP. Besides running numerous educational projects, CMDO responded during emergencies and addressed the issues of refugee children in camps and later their rehabilitation in their native villages. Furthermore, CMDO also undertook research work to get further insight on causes and factors behind children's involvement in armed conflicts in these areas and how children were trapped to become suicide bombers. This research study is one integral part of all such previous efforts and aiming to look further deep into the child protection and care needs of hundreds thousands children entrapped in the armed conflicts in FATA and KP. The research study has developed analysis on socio-economic conditions and causes and reasons behind multiple impacts on the lives of affected children in the conflict areas of FATA and KP and how they are directly engaged by the militant factions in the ongoing violence and conflicts. The study is also providing some insight on the state of children trapped in armed conflicts at global levels and countries in the region and after analyzing child protection policies and programs being implemented in such conflict zones the research study has developed recommendations for a long term child protection program for the tribal regions of Pakistan.

This research study is primarily based on the collection and analysis of secondary data available on the state of children in armed conflicts in tribal areas in particular and rest of the world in general. The study through extensive literature review has attempted to identify children protection policies and programs in practice in the conflict zones in different parts of the world and later incorporated them in designing the fundamental program features for the protection and care of children in the tribal areas of Pakistan and adjacent KP Province. This study is primarily divided into two sections which include an introductory section on children in armed conflicts and another section is on Pakistani tribal children in the armed conflicts. The first section further includes perspectives on the state of children in armed conflicts at global, regional, and national level. The second section of the study includes an overview on the current conditions of tribal children in armed conflicts, causes and reasons behind tribal children direct engagement in the conflict, and outlining the basic features of a proposed child protection program for the tribal areas and adjacent KP province of Pakistan.

## **1.2 Global Perspective on Children in Armed Conflicts**

Recent decades have witnessed a significant increase in the number of armed confrontations internationally, ranging from outright warfare and mass violence to sporadic civil unrest and long-term unstable post-conflict situations. Globally, just over 1 billion children under the age of 18 live in countries or territories affected by armed conflict – almost one sixth of the total world population. Of these, approximately 300 million are under the age of five. In 2006, an estimated 18.1 million children were among populations living with the effects of displacement. Within that group were an estimated 5.8 million refugee children and 8.8 million internally displaced children. The Machel study noted that “an estimated two million children have been killed in armed conflict. Three times as many have been seriously injured or permanently disabled.” These estimates are repeatedly cited as current, though they refer to the period between 1986 and 1996. 33 countries were found to have experienced at least one armed conflict on their own soil between 2002 and 2006. Armed conflict is a global phenomenon,

although Africa and Asia are affected disproportionately: Among the 33 countries and territories, 16 are in Africa and 9 are in Asia. The remaining 8 are in the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America. Roughly half the 33 countries or territories have been designated as 'least developed', while the other half represents a fairly broad range, including some middle-income countries.

Globally, more than two thirds of children under five who are undernourished live in countries affected by conflict. Children out of primary school in these countries constitute as many as two thirds of that group worldwide. And two thirds of conflict affected countries have shown insufficient or no progress in reducing under-five mortality rates. Of populations without improved sanitation and safe drinking water globally, approximately half live in countries affected by conflict. And such countries have higher debt service costs and lower overseas development aid per capita than non-conflict countries. This limits state budgets and other support for children. Furthermore, countries in conflict generally show slow progress towards the MDGs. Of the 20 lowest achievers across all the goals, typically half were affected by armed conflict. The countries that appeared most frequently among the 20 lowest achievers in each of the MDGs are conflict-affected least-developed countries: Afghanistan, Chad, Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan. The unlawful recruitment of children is a violation of international law and a source of physical, emotional, social and psychological harm.

At global level, thousands of children have been so far assisted by formal and informal DDR programs. The types of assistance available for a child's release from armed groups often determine his or her ability to make the transition from military to civilian life and to securely integrate into society. For this reason, The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process involves several long and complicated steps. The Paris Principles define child reintegration as a "process through which children transition into civil society and assume meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities, for the most part, in a context of local and national reconciliation." They go on to say: "Sustainable reintegration is achieved when the political, legal, economic and social conditions



needed for children to maintain life, livelihood, and dignity have been secured. This process aims to ensure that children can benefit from their rights, formal and non-formal education, family unity, dignified livelihoods, and safety from harm.” Following actions are usually incorporated in child protection programs in conflict affected countries.

- Achieve universal implementation of international norms
- End impunity for violations against children
- Prioritize children’s security
- Strengthen monitoring and reporting
- Promote justice for children
- Achieve universal adherence to international standards and norms
- Ensure access to basic services
- Support inclusive reintegration strategies
- End gender-based violence
- Improve capacity and knowledge for quality care and protection of children
- Ensure complementarity among key actors and mainstream children and armed conflict concerns
- Operationalize the engagement of regional bodies
- Ensure that funding matches children’s needs and priorities
- Consolidate the role of United Nations peacekeeping in child protection
- Increase the participation of and support for children and youth
- Integrate children’s rights in peacemaking, peace building and preventive actions

### **1.3 South Asian Perspective on Children in Armed Conflicts**

South Asia is a region profoundly affected by armed conflict and forced migration, with grave implications for the survival, development and wellbeing of children. In Pakistan, Bhutan, India and Bangladesh, governments do not openly acknowledge conflict-related problems within their borders. Access is often denied to international and national monitoring groups such as

the press and human rights organizations. Consequently, little is known about how children in the region are affected by armed conflict, or what legal and practical means exist to aid and support them. Indeed, the present survey of expert knowledge and literature on war-affected children has revealed a number of major information gaps. This has serious ramifications for policy and programmatic intervention in this important field, since effective measures require a full understanding of both the overall situation with respect to armed political struggles and the specific circumstances of children caught up in these struggles.

During recent years an extensive network of child-focused non-governmental organizations, sub-national, national and international, has emerged in South Asia. Most of these agencies invoke the CRC as their guiding policy framework and many concern themselves with the promotion and protection of the rights of children who are socially, economically and / or politically marginalized. However, often for reasons of security, few child-focused aid agencies are actually present in many of the areas affected by conflict, and few have a recognized expertise in this field, or are familiar even with the relevant instruments of international law. The development of understanding about the situation of children affected by armed conflict in South Asia necessitates the following activities:

- Further analysis of the underlying causes of conflict within the region. This will aid the development of more effective preventative and advocacy strategies.
- Examination of the situation of children affected by armed struggle in areas like FATA, Nagaland, Assam, Kashmir, Manipur and the Chittagong Hill Tracts and in countries such as Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan that, to date, have been little reported on. This will help raise awareness of the true extent and effects of armed conflict within the South Asia region.
- Building within interested organizations the analytical, assessment and reporting skills necessary to better foresee conflict, identify correlative phenomena, understand factors affecting children's vulnerability and resilience and gauge the impacts on children.

- Building capacity in child-focused participatory research and implementing pilot programs of primary research with children in selected communities and areas affected by conflict.
- Creating ongoing monitoring systems at national level in countries affected by conflict, with a view to assessing the extent of the problem, trends, nature of impact and so on.

#### **1.4 National Perspective on Children in Armed Conflicts**

Over the last ten years, Pakistan continued to experience attacks by armed groups influenced by and/or associated with Taliban or Al-Qaida, including Tehrik-i-Taliban, on Government institutions and civilians, which escalated and expanded beyond Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) to several major urban centers. Sectarian violence also continued as attacks by armed groups, including the Taliban and Lashkar i Jhangvi, were launched mainly against Shiite processions and mosques. Children have been used by these armed groups to carry out suicide attacks. Children also suffered the effects of cross-border recruitment related to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Although there is no systematic monitoring of cases in Pakistan, the UN country task force on monitoring and reporting in Afghanistan has documented and verified cases of Afghan children recruited and trained in Pakistan by armed groups, including the Taliban. The Malakand-based Sabaoon Academy continued to provide rehabilitation and reintegration support to 150 children who were recruited by the Taliban and other non-State armed groups in Swat Valley and taken into custody by the Pakistan armed forces.

Generally children in conflict-affected areas in Pakistan lives in a 'grey zone', where no one side has total control but where violence might erupt at any time and in any place. Such a situation means that children not only face the risk of death and injury but their entire social, economic and political lives are affected. Conflict can entail the transformation of their family structures, either through the loss of members, through dislocation and displacement, the destruction of social services or through impoverishment and the loss of property. These changing structures have detrimental consequences for the relationships and emotions of children. This is the

context in which children affected by armed conflict in Pakistan live and negotiate, which has implications for their own survival, development and well being. Economic impacts of conflict on children and their families include the loss of property, which can be destroyed in an attack and needs to be replaced. Impoverishment of families in times of violence is often closely linked to growing dependence on children's remunerated work which exposes children to hazards. The propensity of children exposed to violence to turn to violence themselves is sobering for it suggests that cycles of violence are being created in Pakistan. Unless present conflicts are resolved, yet more generations of children will become frustrated over the lack of progress and will feel compelled to fight to air their grievances.

Pakistan in the recent past has made some progress towards recognizing child rights. Its commitments include: the ratification of the UNCRC; the signing of UNCRC's Optional Protocols related to recruitment of child soldiers and child pornography (the ratifications are pending); the ratification of ILO Conventions 182 and 138, and adoption of the Millennium Development Goals. Other steps include: the promulgation of the Juvenile Justice Systems Ordinance 2000; the Employment of Children Act 1991, the expansion to the list of hazardous and prohibited forms of labor and the enactment of the Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act 2004. Laws for making primary education compulsory have been introduced in all provinces and areas except the province of Balochistan, the Northern Areas and Azad Jammu Kashmir, but remain un-enforced. The National Child Protection Policy and the Child Protection Bill remain work in progress. On the whole, this policy and legislative environment is ineffective and inadequate and expected improvement in the situation of children has not materialized.

## **Section II Children in Armed Conflicts in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan**

### **2.1 An Overview on Tribal Children Affected in the Armed Conflicts**

One fundamental factor behind violent conflicts in FATA and KP is lack of state control which is further aggravated by on-going war against terrorism in the region. Over the last decade, Tribal areas of Pakistan and its adjacent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province continued to experience attacks by Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Attacks have targeted Government sites, schools and civilians, including children, in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Children are aggressively used by Taliban in various suicide attacks in the region. During the last year, 11 incidents were reported of children being used by armed groups to carry out suicide attacks, involving 10 boys, some as young as 13, and one 9-year old girl. In one such incident, on 3 April 2011, one boy was killed and another was arrested in a double suicide attack on a Sufi shrine in Dera Ghazi Khan, southern Punjab, which killed 50 people and injured 120. A 14-year-old survivor reported having been trained for two months in Taliban camps in North Waziristan. In another incident on 19 August 2011, a boy was used in a suicide attack during Friday prayers at a mosque in the Ghundai area of Khyber Agency, killing 48 people and injuring more than 100.

Children continued to be victims of indiscriminate attacks, including by improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings. During the last year a total of 57 children were killed from landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices (38), bomb blasts (11), shelling (4) and targeted attacks (4). In one case, on 5 June 2011, a bomb blast in a bazaar outside Peshawar killed seven people, including an 11-year-old girl, and injured four other children, for which TTP claimed responsibility. In another case, on 13 September 2011, TPP allegedly attacked a school bus in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, killing four children. Child casualties as a result of landmines and other explosive devices remained a serious. The majority of the casualties in last year were reported in Khyber- Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, including the killing of 30 children (25 boys and 5 girls) and injuring of 49 children

(29 boys and 20 girls). With regard to the abduction of children, 27 boys from Bajaur Agency were abducted along the border with Afghanistan by armed militants of TTP. Seventeen children under the age of 10 were released by TTP and two other boys managed to escape, leaving at least eight children with TTP. The remaining children are believed to be in the neighboring Kunar Province in Afghanistan.

Schools continued to be directly targeted by armed groups in bomb and improvised explosive device attacks. 152 incidents of partial or complete destruction of school facilities in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa were reported in the last year. According to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas Department of Education, a total number of 73 schools were damaged in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, with the remainder occurring in Khyber- Pakhtunkhwa. In a double attack on in Charsadda District, a Government primary school for girls and a primary school for boys were blown up. In neighboring Mohmand Agency, TTP claimed responsibility for the attack, reportedly to avenge military operations in the region and in opposition to secular and girls' education. Malala Yousaf Zai-A renowned child activist on girls' education- is recently shot in head in Swat which sparked national and global outcry.

Despite the extensive aid operation, internally displaced children in FATA and KP Province have been subjected to many human rights violations associated with their displacement. Children were injured and killed in conflict and flight; children experienced mental trauma; children were separated from their families. While children had some access to shelter, food, and healthcare, the shelters they lived in were often overcrowded, and girls were unable to get medical treatment in areas lacking female health professionals. Millions of displaced children and others from host communities missed months of schooling. There are strong indications that rates of domestic violence and corporal punishment, child labor, and forced marriage increased during the displacement period. Yet crucially monitoring of many of these issues was insufficient, and consequently responses lagged behind or were not targeted for the specific needs of displaced children.

In this massive displacement, children were dispersed through rural areas, towns, cities, and camps, and were frequently out of the reach of aid providers. Inadequate funding for child protection and education, as well as security limitations on humanitarian access, resulted in problems monitoring and responding to displaced children's needs. Comprehensive protection monitoring in all affected areas, including host communities and return areas, lays the foundation for the delivery of effective support and enables the community, government, and other aid providers to formulate culturally- appropriate responses to the needs of the most vulnerable internally displaced children. Both returnee and displaced children need stronger protection to ensure their well-being. Humanitarian and development actors must work together, as the situation shifts between emergency and recovery phases in various areas, to ensure appropriate responses to displaced children's needs.

Children in armed conflicts in FATA and KP Province are particularly at risk of abuse, exploitation, and neglect. Such affected children were left without comprehensive protection monitoring and effective responses to their situations in many areas of displacement. Internally displaced children in host communities lived a more normal life than those in camps, but were less visible to aid providers, leaving them particularly vulnerable to protection issues. Children affected by displacement – both displaced children and children in host communities – lost many months of education, both damaging their development and diminishing their capacity to respond to protection crises they face.

## **2.2 Tribal Children involvement in the Armed Conflicts**

Conflict harm weaves an interconnected web of destruction. Injuries, deaths, loss of property, displacement, lost livelihoods, emotional trauma, destruction of infrastructure, and breakdown of communities compound one another to create a devastating and untenable situation for the tribal population. Much of the local population is mired in grief: widows mourn husbands, parents mourn children, and children mourn their caretakers; the disabled are marginalized;

and, families are often pushed into poverty or trapped in debt as they struggle to cope with losses. Displacement, damage to infrastructure and markets as well as the loss of businesses, livestock, land, and other agricultural goods exacerbate civilian losses and make recovery a substantially more daunting task. The resultant instability provides a fertile ground for Taliban factions who take advantage of job loss, dislocation, governmental failures, and perceptions of injustice to draw young age recruits from the tribal population.

The tribal children direct involvement in armed conflicts is closely linked with the informal Mudrasa education system. The link between schooling and training for active combat is most clearly seen within the 'madrasa' system. Madrasas are privately funded educational establishments, often with a strongly political and sectarian basis, grounded in religious teachings. Many, although certainly not all, have a militant character and have been behind the training of fighters for the Afghan and Kashmir conflicts. They proliferated amongst local tribes and Afghan refugees and provided the bulwark of mujahedeen and Taliban war-training. Today the Coalition against the Use of Child Soldiers state that: "the situation of children educated in many of Pakistan's Islamic schools is a matter of concern". The popularity of madrassa education in Pakistan has been related to factors of poverty and the poor and corrupt standards of formal education. These make madrassas an attractive alternative for parents, especially amongst the poor since many madrassas offer free accommodation and food.

A UN report in September 2007 found that Pakistan remained an important source of human and material assistance for the insurgency in Afghanistan generally and suicide attacks in particular. Madrasas served as an alternative to the failing public school system in many areas for those unable to afford private education, and also attracted those seeking religious instruction for their children. Many madrasas failed to provide an adequate education, focusing solely on Islamic studies, and there was no regulation or oversight of the education given in numerous unregistered madrasas. Some madrasas reportedly continued to promote religious radicalism and violence, and were used for military training, although madrasas were not the sole recruiting grounds for insurgents and the majority was not involved in militancy. Following



are the some fundamental reasons behind tribal children engagement in the ongoing conflicts in the FATA and KP Province.

**Forced Recruitment:** Forced recruitments of children in the tribal areas done by the local military commanders. Such tactics include putting pressures on local tribes, house to house searches, and seizing children from secondary schools.

**Ideological motivation:** Taliban have sought to “arm the children spiritually and emotionally for the battles that lie ahead.” Their teaching, often affected through the madrasa system, has stressed the righteousness of fighting a holy war, or ‘jihad’, in the name of Islam. In recent times, young people also fighting to protect an ethnic or regional identity.

**Economic Necessity:** A number of economic factors contribute to young people joining Taliban factions: in conditions of impoverishment parents may encourage them to leave so as to have one less mouth to feed. Also militant groups may offer financial and material provision.

**The Desire for Vengeance:** Those who have met with young Taliban soldiers note that they are often inspired to fight in order to avenge the death of a family member from the hand of security forces. Given that fighting continues and people continue to be killed, there could be an enduring legacy of retaliatory violence by todays young for many years to come.

CMDO in recent past undertook a research study that aimed to explore the causes and factors that compel children to engage in armed conflicts. The study through interviewing 30 militant children who were captured by security forces further explored roles and responsibilities of children while they were working for militants. Findings of the study revealed that the majority of children came from poor socio-economic background. Parents, especially mothers, of the children had never studied in a formal school setting. Due to low level of education, parents of most of the children were involved in unskilled labor where they earned very less. All the children interviewed quit their schools as early as before completing their elementary education, and joined the militants as young as 12.

Strong religious affiliation and unfriendly household were other reasons that compelled children to engage in militancy. Children shared that their parents and older siblings rarely talk to them and they found themselves confined in their households. Daily routine of the children prior to joining the militants was that they used to watch *Jihadi* videos and attend religious gathering organized by the militant. These were found motivating factors which according to the children encouraged them to be part of the war against *Kafirs* (non-Muslims). Children were either directly approached by the militants or were mainly assisted by friends, teachers from *madrassa*, parents or close friends to join the insurgents. The majority of children interviewed during the study revealed that they were unaware of the consequences of joining the militants. Many of the parents interviewed shared that although they knew about the involvement of their children but they were unhappy about their children decision of working for militants.

Children during the study also informed that they were gradually passed on through different stages by the militants. In the beginning they used to attend lectures which provoked them to fight to death against the *Kafir*. Some of them were responsible for serving tea to the militants and do other small chores. Majority of the children revealed that they never participated in any fight and they were mainly used for spying. Children were also probed on things they liked and disliked about the militants. Few of the many characteristics they liked about the militants included: bravery, promptness, justice, love for Islam, promoting *Jihad*, and feud against wealthy people. Things they disliked included: Inhuman behavior against civilian, destruction of schools, despising women, kidnapping, and anti-Pakistan stance.

In view of the gravity and magnitude of problems faced by tribal children who are directly and indirectly engaged in the ongoing armed conflict in FATA and KP province, it is need of the hour to press forward all concerned government institutions and civil society organizations to accelerate the process of implementing child protection and care policies and programs in the entire conflict affect zone in the region. Although Government's child protection policy for FATA and establishment of child protection centers are welcoming steps but still a lot need to be done to transform from temporary reactive approach to a long term preventive approach on

addressing the burning issues and severity of challenges faced by the tribal children in the conflict zone. At present, there are less comprehensive children protection programs for the entire FATA and KP provinces which are worst affected by violence and conflicts in the last decade.

### **2.3 Children Protection Program for the Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province**

In order to strengthen and supplement Government's efforts on improving the protection and care of war affected tribal children, it is here by strongly recommended to organize a consultative workshop of all concerned stakeholders for the detailed planning of a long term child protection program for the tribal areas and adjacent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Such program should be planned and implemented by tribal civil society with external support structures from the government and international institutions exclusively working on child rights issues in emergencies and conflict zone. The program designed interventions should incorporate the application of holistic and multidisciplinary community based development approaches while establishing community level demonstration areas in FATA and KP. Whereas, policy research and advocacy activities at local, provincial, national, regional, and global scales should also designed and incorporated in the proposed program. Such program should ensure the incorporation of following features while designing grass root level children protection activities in the entire targeted conflict zone.

**Building resilience** – Program targeting children affected by armed conflict and violence tend to promote the process of building resilience, by strengthening the individual's and the communities' inner and external resources. Education and vocational training, for example, facilitate the professional reintegration of young people and their families and help them build a better future.

**Youth participation** – This implies not only working *for* young people, but also working *with* them to develop their own identities and increase their self-esteem. Youth participation leads

to greater levels of ownership, and thus to greater acceptance of the program and increased likelihood of its sustainability.

**Local ownership and sustainability** – Local ownership is achieved when there are collective decision-making mechanisms in which the community is fully involved at all stages of the program cycle. Community members will be motivated to volunteer for a program because they want to help address problems that affect all of them and because they want to be part of the solution. Ultimately, the community must be able to say it is their program, and not something that is entirely dependent on outsiders. Local ownership also ensures that program is culturally appropriate, follow a bottom-up approach, respect local traditions and is rooted in existing practices

The proposed program should also design a range of research and advocacy activities in order to accelerate the policy and legislation implementation process at local, provincial, and national levels. The proposed program should also work towards establishing systematic data bases on children affected by armed conflicts in tribal areas and KP province and effective evaluation and monitoring system on protecting the basic rights of children in emergencies and conflict zones. Following are some important actions which also need to be incorporated while designing research and advocacy activities of the proposed program.

- Plan and undertake research studies on the types of conflicts in the entire region, conflicts impacts on the well being and future development of tribal children, assessments on the children protection needs in FATA and KP province.
- Advocate for the passing of legislations on children's rights that brings Pakistan's laws in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and ensure that legislation adequately provides for the needs of internally displaced children.

- Advocate for promptly adopting all pending legislation, including the Charter of the Rights of the Child Bill, the Child Protection (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, and the National Commission on the Rights of Children (NCRC) Bill.
- Establish an independent and effective monitoring mechanism and data collection system on children's rights that has sufficient human and financial resources to evaluate and document children's rights issues in a comprehensive manner
- Lobby and negotiate with state institutions and security forces to ensure humanitarian access throughout conflict-affected zones. Ensure that all impartial aid providers have access to all displaced people including children.
- Conduct effective and comprehensive campaigns to raise the awareness of displaced and host communities on children's welfare and rights; ensure that men, women, and children have the opportunity to participate.
- Advocate for the implementation of all possible measures to prevent and prohibit the recruitment of children for armed conflict, including by: Ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal
- Mobilize and organize local tribal communities for taking all possible measures to prevent and prohibit recruitment of children for armed conflict and terrorist activities, including suicide attacks.
- Advocate for the financial resource generation so that protection of children's rights is prioritized at every stage of an emergency, from emergency response to longer-term recovery, so that the impact of the crisis on children is minimized.

- Prioritize the establishment of a comprehensive, effective monitoring system to assess children's needs and enjoyment of rights in all areas of displacement including in host communities, and in areas of return.
- Consider establishing a working group on children affected by armed conflict to address more effectively the concerns of internally displaced children, and to cooperate with other agencies monitoring children affected by armed conflict, including child protection agencies working on cross-border issues among Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

There are countless suffering and plights of children affected by the prevailing armed conflict in the entire tribal belt and adjacent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The scale and magnitude of problems concerning to the tribal children's protection and care are so huge that all previous and current efforts could not able to adequately respond them. Resultantly, it is evident that local tribes are fastly moving towards irreparable losses to a significant portion of their entire next generation. It is utmost need of the hour that all concerned stakeholders should seriously take up this all important issue concerning to the future growth and development of tribal youth and devise short to medium to long term strategies and actions on resolving the tribal children protection issues in conflict zones and ensuring full scale disengagement of children from taking part in any kind of armed conflict and violence. Both government and civil society organizations should collectively pursue this highly important objective through the implementation of a long term child protection program in the entire region.