Children Associated With Armed Forces or Armed Groups

Worldwide the use of child soldiers is seen as one of the worst forms of child labour. During civil conflicts children are used by governments and armed groups for all sorts of tasks that put them at risk of death or injury and have long-term impacts on their lives. They may be used as foot soldiers, messengers, spies, cooks, as porters for supplies including ammunition and explosives, or in cultural groups as fund collectors. During the People's War in Nepal many children under the age of 18 became involved with different armed groups.

With the signing of a peace accord in 2006 the Maoists agreed to surrender their arms and join a peace process. A series of cantonments were set up across Nepal to accommodate the armed fighters and weapons. Many young people under the age of 18 entered the camps as combatants. The United Nations Mission in Nepal was tasked with managing a verification process. Those over 18 years of age that met the criteria were declared eligible for support and later integration into Nepal’s new security structure. Many of the younger combatants or CAAFAG did not enter the cantonments or left before verification.

Who Can be Considered A Child Associated With Armed Forces or Armed Groups?

To be considered as Children Associated With Armed Forces or Armed Groups – CAAFAG, the children must have been under 18 years of age at the time of recruitment and been used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to use as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to boys and girls who took a direct part in hostilities.

According to the Paris Principles, in the Nepali context CAAFAG include all children associated with national Security Forces such as the Police Force (PF), the Armed Police Force (APF) the National Army (NA), and the People Liberation Army (PLA)/CPN-M, Terai armed groups and also those arrested or detained because of their association with the CPN-M and other armed groups or vigilante groups. It also includes political groups like youth leagues, student unions and cultural groups that have not renounced violence.

A person who was associated with an armed forced or armed group in Nepal and was born later than May 25th, 1988 is assumed to have been recruited when he or she was younger than 18 and hence falls within the definition of CAAFAG. However, many of these youth do not know their exact birth date and it is therefore hard to determine their status.
Who are the CAAFAG in Nepal?

The UN working group estimated that there were about 10,000 CAAFAG across the country based on surveys and information available in 2006. The majority of CAAFAG were boys but it was estimated that 38% were girls. Data from 46 districts later found 61% of the CAAFAG identified were boys. In general, it has been observed that the Maoist forces have had a considerable appeal among rural women. Rural young women were drawn to the CPN (M) forces largely because it promised them freedom from a life of servility or because they had been abused or seen their family members, relatives or neighbors victimized by the security forces. The CAAFAG girls who return from armed forces usually suffer from a deeper ostracism in their community and in many cases, the family rushes them into marriage upon their return. Some girls are still hiding their identity and past role in the conflict for fear that they will be rejected by society. It is more challenging to enroll these girls in any educational and reintegration program.

Little was known about the ethnic and caste composition of CAAFAG in Nepal. Over the past three years, 7,269 of youth that were CAAFAG have been identified and supported by UNICEF and NGOs. Of these CAAFAG that have been enrolled in reintegration programs, 48% were ethnic minorities Janjatis, 28% Brahman/Chettri and 24% Dalits. This caste breakdown is a testimony to the fact that the majority of CAAFAG are from the most discriminated and disadvantaged groups.

Children who became CAAFAG, even when coming from upper castes Brahman and Chettri, tended to come from the poorest most marginalized households. Some academic research has suggested that many Dalits joined the Maoists to escape the rigid social hierarchy of caste discrimination. The Maoists recruited heavily among Dalits and women to fill the lower ranks of their army. Dalit men and women, who endure extreme marginalization under the caste system, may experience a feeling of unprecedented authority, control, and empowerment when armed with a weapon.

"I realized that without education, our future is dark. I committed my friends to enroll in school like me." (CAAFA in Salyan District)

Names of all CAAFAG have been changed to maintain the children's confidentiality.
Dalit, Poor and Fatherless

After his father’s death, Bal Bahadur (Bale) dropped out of school (in grade 4) and left for India where he worked in a local hotel as a dish washer. After 2.5 months he returned back to Nepal, realizing he needed to build his skills in order to find better employment. He decided to stay at his uncle’s house who had a family tailoring business and to learn tailoring as an apprentice. After three months, his uncle started to pay him salary for his work.

Growing up in a Dalit family, at the age of 17 Bale was extremely influenced by the Maoist party’s motto “rise from discrimination” that was a call against marginalization and discrimination of Dalits and other minority groups. The members of the party convinced Bale that they would look after his family’s health and livelihood. Driven by the party ideology, Bale decided to join the Maoist forces. Despite his wish to become a cultural artist, he was recruited to be a combatant in the forces and was based in Nawalparasi. During that time, Bale admits that life was extremely difficult - the physical work was extremely hard and he only earned Rs. 500 per month which was hardly enough to survive. He had no social life and was always in trainings. He also felt that these extreme trainings were harmful to his health and over time concluded that being in the People’s Liberation Army would have no long-term benefits for his future. He stayed for 15 months with the forces, leaving when he realized having been verified as a minor he would not be eligible for the Nepal Army.

After returning to his village, he found it challenging to get back to tailoring his previous occupation. He wanted to start his own tailoring business but did not have sufficient skills to do that. He was later contacted by a CAAFAQ facilitator from the local NGO who provided him with information about the program and the kind of vocational training available in his community. Bale decided to join a three-month long tailoring training that helped him enhance his skills and gain the needed self-confidence to start his own tailoring business. After completing the training, the program bought him a sewing machine so that he could start his own business working from his home. He later received a Business Development Skills (BDS) training that helped him gain economic and business skills (market assessment, accounting and book keeping, savings, marketing) that were essential for his business initiative.

Bale can now make clothes for both men and women in different designs. Besides the traditional styles, he can also make clothes according to new trends and respond to the demand for new designs in his VDC. He is still in contact with his tailoring and BDS trainers who continue to provide him with valuable advice on how to promote his business outside his VDC and keep up with new emerging trends.
Where do most of the CAAFAG come from?

CAAFAG children have been identified in almost every district of the country. From UNICEF’s reintegration data the greatest numbers of children now back in the community were born in the Mid-Western Region (37%). There were also significant numbers of CAAFAG born in the hills of the Eastern Region (25%), with the Western Region (14%), Central (12%) and the Far West (12 %). Many of the CAAFAG registered in the program do not have a permanent home community having migrated several times in their lives.

Why did these children join armed forces or armed groups?

Poverty, domestic violence and second marriages in the family are the main reasons children give as to why they got involved in armed groups. The commitment and involvement of adults in their community also influenced them to join armed groups. Most children say that they joined voluntarily with a relatively low percentage of CAAFAG in reintegration programs saying they were forcefully recruited (16% of the beneficiaries in Salyan, 11% in Khotang, 38% in Okhaldunga, 13% in Parbat, 22% in Myagdi, 32% in Bhojpur, 42% in Sankhuwasabha and 11% in Kavre).

While the majority of CAAFAG do not consider themselves to have been ‘forced’ to enlist determining forced recruitment can be difficult to determine. The term ‘forced’ can be defined differently – a scenario where immense pressure is exerted might not be seen as force, yet such a situation might not present the child/youth with any other option but to enlist. While young people may appear to choose military service, the choice is not exercised freely. They may be driven by any of several forces, including cultural, social, economic or political pressures. During the height of the conflict the Maoists recruited children through propaganda programs in schools or at mass gatherings. Songs, dance, and theatrical performances were designed to appeal to children; often children were the performers in order to attract other children. For both boys and girls it was primarily friends that persuaded them to join. This would suggest that recruitment of children has a multiplier effect; the more children that are recruited, the more children those children recruit, and in a fashion similar to that of a pyramid scheme, the effect of which is very rapid growth.

Before the ceasefire many children joined as Maoist cadres after ideological training or because the Maoists offered them a way out of unemployment and poverty. With poverty in Nepal seriously exacerbated by years of conflict, many Nepali children faced a bleak future and found the prospect of fighting for the Maoists preferable. The CAAFAG who were forcibly recruited were less enthusiastic about remaining in the forces than those who joined voluntarily. As a result forcefully recruited CAAFAG are more likely to have left the forces and be in reintegration program while those who were more committed stayed in the cantonments.
A Common Strategy for Reintegration in Nepal

The United Nations, international donors and civil society groups have joined efforts for successful reintegration of youth that have been associated with armed forces or armed groups back into society. Education, including nonformal education, formal schooling and vocational education, is seen as one strategy to achieving this. UNICEF has been working with a number of INGOs/NGOs and other agencies to provide reintegration services to CAAFAG and other children affected by conflict. Based on the understanding among the organizations providing support, common financial and programmatic norms have been agreed so that there is uniformity across the country in providing services. The reintegration support can only benefit a child who is no longer associated with the group he/she was involved with, although sensitization and advocacy efforts can target children still associated with armed groups to encourage them to leave these groups.

Through the working group, services have been provided in 46 districts for 7,269 CAAFAG. UNICEF and the US Department Of Labor have been supporting World Education since November 2007 in providing reintegration, reunification and community sensitization support for children affected by conflict and their communities in eight target districts: Kavre, Salyan, Myagdi, Parbat, Khotang, Okhaldunga, Bhojpur and Sankhuwasabha as part of this effort.

"I don’t know where I would be and how dreadful my life would be if I didn’t join school. My life has totally changed since then and I can now see the hope and brighter part of life."

(CAAFAG in Myagdi District)
Services that were provided by World Education and its partners

World Education and six partner NGOs in eight districts were responsible for tracing and reunification if required, community sensitization and reintegration activities for CAAFG and vulnerable children. They identified 1,186 CAAFG and provided services to 958 children. The educational needs of CAAFG vary depending on their current age and previous educational achievements. Older youth that completed primary school are often interested and able to return to formal school and complete additional grades. However, those that have never attended formal school or have only a primary level education had a different range of needs. Youth that dropped out from Primary School may have few of the literacy and numeracy skills that would be needed to enable them to make a living. The majority of CAAFG in Nepal are more than 14, which is the legal working age in Nepal. Many children from poor families are not interested in returning to school, and are more interested in vocational education with a view to gaining better employment.

The educational and reintegration services were provided to four groups of direct beneficiaries:

1. Children leaving cantonment sites during the second stage verification process.
2. Children who have left cantonments or fighting forces, on their own and are back in their communities.
3. Children leaving the other CPN-M affiliated groups through individual or group negotiation developed by UN, CAAFG/WG organizations, 1612 task force organizations or other structure such as government or community.
4. Vulnerable children and conflict affected children. This definition applies to children from the same community of return of the CAAFG children and who will also benefit directly from the reintegration support.

First identification of the most needy CAAFG and vulnerable children in the community was needed for reintegration support and enrollment in appropriate educational programs. The NGO partners worked with Community Based Organizations and district level line agencies to identify CAAFG and the most vulnerable children in the community and to determine the support they needed. Based on these assessments those most in need of support were identified.
Provision of reintegration support for CAAFAG and vulnerable children

Under the CAAFAG process, returning CAAFAG were entitled to a number of interventions and support. These included educational activities as well as some support to address livelihoods or income generation. Each CAAFAG had different needs that were determined during the initial assessments. Special attention was also given to ensure that communities were adequately prepared for the return and reintegration of CAAFAG. The following services were provided as components in the reintegration package:

A. School Support

About 56% of CAAFAG have returned to school. Most of the CAAFAG beneficiaries who receive school support enrolled back into Grades Nine and Ten. Initially many schools were reluctant to accept CAAFAG, fearing that these youth would have a negative impact on the learning environment. To motivate schools to enroll CAAFAG and address the challenges of reintegrating these students in to the school system the program provided a financial contribution for each CAAFAG enrolled. These funds were used by the schools for construction or purchasing library books, new equipment, etc.

For CAAFAG females, who represent 41% of school support beneficiaries, the completion of upper grades has a direct correlation not only on their employment options but on the way they are treated by their families and their marriage prospects and thus indirectly on their future economic outlook.

**Most Successful Approaches**

- Preparatory meetings with teachers, SMC and PTA members, and child club leaders before the enrollment of CAAFAG in the schools were helpful in order to ensure their successful reintegration and positive acceptance in the classroom.
- Some CAAFAG suffer from discipline and concentration problems, others feel ostracized. The community, the PTA, SMC and CPC members played an active role in the mentoring and motivating CAAFAG through regular visits and encouragement.
- Complementary to the provision of scholarships, the program worked with families to address their economic situation.
Back to School to Start Over

Between the sixth and ninth grades, Laxmi was actively engaged as treasurer in a Maoist assembled student group at her school that was responsible for raising fees to support needy students. In 2006, she left with other student members to join the Maoists Peoples Liberation Army at the age of 16. Laxmi says they joined of their own volition: “We got together to be united in our fight for freedom from discrimination.”

Laxmi is unlike most of the girls in her District, according to a former NGO facilitator, who got involved through friends or siblings convincing them, rather than understanding the politics or the social implications. Laxmi says she had no intention of leaving the Maoist forces. She did similar work for them as when she was in school, raising fees for cultural programs. More importantly, she says she found more ethnic and gender equality while with the forces. As section leader, she was responsible for 10 cadres, overseeing their daily training, resolving issues such as home leave and disputes, and managing duty shifts.

Laxmi would have stayed in the cantonment but when her father began calling she returned home. Her father was sick and needed help at home to care for Laxmi’s paralyzed mother and five other siblings. Two weeks after being home, she called her commander to say she could not return. The Maoists came looking for her but at the time she was in Kathmandu tending to her father’s medical treatment.

Initially, it was hard being home for Laxmi. The community treated girls who were involved as Maoists with disgust, she says, assuming that because they worked together, they slept together. With the support of the local NGO, Laxmi and the other returning youth explained to community members that life in the Maoist army was very different from what they perceived and demanded discipline, which has helped make her reintegration easier.

Laxmi is now repeating the ninth grade with school support. She says she is settled with life at home, though it is very different from her days as a combatant—she compares learning to use weapons to household chores. And not unlike many youth, Laxmi wants to learn a skill, get a job and show her parents and society that she can be an asset.

When asked whether given the choice now between continuing her education or life as a Maoist soldier, Laxmi says she will now pursue her education, adding: “In Nepal, youth can only move forward through education. Without education, you can’t work, or gain skills. They all ask how much you have studied.”
Major Challenges for Children Returning to School

- **Re-entering in Lower Grades than Contemporaries** - One of the biggest barriers for children who have been out-of-school for a significant period of time is that once they re-join they are enrolled in lower grades than their old friends. This tends to stigmatize them and jeopardize their academic prospects and social reintegration. For those who have been out-of-school for several years re-enrollment becomes less and less of an option.

- **Difficulty Readjusting to Life in the Classroom** - Many of these children have lost their study habits and are seen as a burden on the teachers in the classrooms. Some of these teachers were not enthusiastic about having CAAFAG in their classrooms and therefore need to be sensitized and prepared properly prior to these children’s enrollment.

Lessons learned on re-integrating in formal school

- **Multi-year Financial Support** - Most of the school support beneficiaries need more than one year of financial support as they are not able to pay their school expenses beyond the program’s support. It is therefore recommended to provide support until SLC.

- **Positive Role of Mentors and Motivators** - Regular monitoring and follow-up support by NGO staff and local mentors encouraged returning students to persevere and improve their studies.

- **Real Needs and Ambitious Plans But Few Resources** - Many schools that received financial support for each CAAFAG that was enrolled prioritized school construction. These schools then had difficulty leveraging additional funding to complete the projects.

- **School Support Helps Girls Continue Education** - Girls are more often forced to drop out of school than boys for financial reasons. The school support helped promote equality among boys and girls in school participation.

“I am regular in the class and interested in participating in the school’s activities, and my aim is to be a doctor.”

*(CAAFAF in Salyan District)*
B. Vocational training and apprenticeships:

Many CAAFAG were not interested in staying in their home communities for the long-term. A major objective of the vocational training was to provide them with sufficient skills to earn an income in their locality but that would be also transferable. They could then use these skills to earn money in different settings in Nepal, India and even abroad. Skills trainings varied in length depending on the occupation but basic trainings were on average three months. In vocations where more advanced skills level were needed, an additional three months of training were provided. The trainings were provided either in the form of apprenticeships in a local workshop or business or in vocational training centers. In many cases, the beneficiaries were from remote VDCs and also required residential living options.

The types of vocational trainings selected varied by district but typically were linked to the local job market, available resources and the interests of CAAFAG. Certain skills are clearly in demand and were preferred by program beneficiaries including house wiring (24% of boys), electronics repair (21% of boys) and tailoring (10% of boys). Electrical wiring was a popular choice for boys as youth are able to apply the skills gained within a variety of jobs and there are also good employability opportunities in remote areas, especially for self-employment ventures, with the expansion of the electricity grid and as remittances from abroad promote the purchase of electrical goods needing repair. For female vocational trainees, the majority of girl beneficiaries (69%) chose tailoring with some choosing weaving and a few computer skills training.
Most Successful Approaches

- **Job training by skilled craftsmen** - Apprenticeship type training in a locally owned workshop by a carpenter, plumber, mason, tailor is usually an ideal environment for vocational skills training. The trainee is able to receive hands on training in a protective environment and the chances to get employment with the same craftsman or others in the community are relatively better. If the apprenticeship is successful, the craftsman is also more likely to take other students in the future.

- **Self-employment for graduates** - The training provided by the program is relatively short and it is often hard to find employment for graduates. If they start their own small-scale enterprise, they gain valuable experience and are able to plan and shape it according to their own needs and desires. The youth can also clearly see that as they spend more time and effort in their business, the more successful and profitable it becomes.

- **Links to credit** - After starting their own micro-enterprise, using their learned skills, the beneficiaries should be linked to local credit schemes so that they can get sufficient capital for buying the necessary equipment.

- **Use of career planning module** - Some youth have minimum or no economic literacy skills that are essential for starting self-enterprise. The modules provide guidance in savings, market assessment, business plan, how to work in a group, tools for self-evaluation, research and decision-making that are essential and can be gained through self-learning.
Major challenges for vocational training and apprenticeships:

- **Selection of Appropriate Occupations and Training** - Many beneficiaries want to attend computer training. However, jobs for computer operators are few and there is intense competition. Also, many youth beneficiaries that attend the training with insufficient prior formal education find it extremely difficult and frustrating to handle the curriculum. Those trainees who have already passed the SLC exam have had the most success with this and have been able to market their skills.

- **Gender Constraints** - Male youth enjoy more cultural freedom than female youth, including the ability to travel more freely. As a result, they have been able to participate in a wider selection of skill trainings whereas families have prevented girls from attending some of these options.

- **Lack of Training Providers** - Many CAAFAG live in remote areas and it is hard to find appropriate trainings in these areas. There is also a lack of local institutions that can provide appropriate vocational training even within districts.

- **High Costs of Residential Vocational Training** - NGO partners sometimes need to move the children to the district headquarters for training and there are not sufficient funds to cover the residential and training costs. The youth from remote VDCs who participated in trainings in the district headquarters often need to go home to visit their families on weekends and miss training days.

- **Job Placement After Training** - It is impossible to guarantee jobs for youth that finish the vocational training. The vocational training institutions need to be more responsible in assisting with job placement after beneficiaries finish training. This should be indicated in the contract and helps ensure that providers make sure skills are as relevant as possible to the job market. Bonuses for successful job placement would help discourage institutions from focusing on easily provided skills rather than marketable skills. In addition, these institutions should also provide non-conventional skills (at the moment many focus on skills such as tailoring or driving).

- **Weak Rural Markets** - Even when skilled and highly motivated youth start enterprises to provide services or produce goods weak local markets are a challenge. Local governments and business leaders need to be encouraged to support youth entrepreneurs by sourcing as many goods and services as possible locally.

- **Self-employment for graduates** - Many CAAFAG who finish their vocational training choose self-employment. Although this has many benefits, there are also some constraints for some vocations such as carpentry require large investment and the profits are slow. The youth have high expectations to generate income quickly and need to be prepared for the challenges entailed with each specific vocation.
A Respected Carpenter at Last

Sushan Rizal left home to join the Maoists for promises of a sturdy salary. Then 16, Sunil had very little going for him.

The child of a Dalit woman who remarried and later had two sons with her second husband, Sushan had a tumultuous relationship with his stepfather — an alcoholic who favored his biological sons over Sushan. He dropped out of school in the third grade and was loafing about the house, attracting more contempt from his stepfather.

But the PLA offered him no solace, and when it became clear that Sushan would not meet the age criteria for the United Nations age verification of combatants, after an 18-month stint, his commanders suggested Sushan return and support Maoist efforts from his village.

In 2007, Sushan was identified as a CAAFAG by World Education’s Kavre partner organization, Samaj Sewa Samuha at a critical time. Sushan needed a skill under his belt, and prospects for employment that would help him contribute to household expenses and avert his stepfather’s scorn.

Through an assessment with his facilitator geared toward guiding Sushan to the vocational training best suited for his aptitude and interest, he opted for carpentry. The NGO arranged for Sushan’s three-month training at Swastik Furnishers, an up and coming woodshop owned by a socially minded entrepreneur in the nearby bazaar. The owner agreed to hire Sushan for a trail period after his training.

While he trained, to help abate some pressure at home, the program offered Sushan’s family food support through WFPs matching efforts. Today, Sushan has moved to town and is working in a furniture workshop. The owner is pleased with Sushan and would like him to continue working there. Sushan is renting a flat next door to the workshop and already feels very comfortable with his new living and work arrangements. Sushan is considering changing his workplace, exploring options now open to him with his new skills.

"The program gave us scholarship; I joined the school and study regularly. The food support is helping us to study.

( CAAFAG in Khotang District)"
Lessons learned on vocational training and apprenticeships:

- **Standard budgets are a constraint** - For vocational training, the allocated budget is the same for all beneficiaries across the nation. For those who live in remote VDCs, it is not sufficient enough to cover their travel and residence expenses, for those who get the training in their locality, the budget is too high for their needs and expenses. When allocating budgets for vocational training, it is important to consider such factors as the occupation, distance between the trainee and the training center/apprenticeship and provide funds accordingly.

- **Vocational Skills and Commitment Promote Trust** - Graduating CAAFAG youth gained the trust of family and community members after acquiring vocational skills and proving their seriousness regarding their own future. Community members are now more willing to provide them loans for their new business initiatives and support them by providing employment opportunities.

- **NGOs Network with Training Providers and Employers** - Providing appropriate vocational training to beneficiaries is becoming less challenging over time as the NGO partners are developing stronger links and connections with the local vocational institutions and employers who can provide apprenticeships or post training employment.

- **Need for Advanced Skills** - Some occupations such as tailoring require first basic then advanced skills training in order for trainees to master their vocation. Advanced training is needed to attain sufficient professionalism to be competitive when starting their own tailoring business in their home VDC.

**Business Development Support for Self-employment**

After providing vocational training, NGO staff and volunteers conducted assessments of the status of the beneficiaries graduating from vocational training to determine who were most in need of follow-up support. Priority was given to youth that were planning or had started to pursue self-employment. Follow-up support was not provided according to the individual’s demand but instead, the NGO partners explained what kind of support was available in order to put together the most appropriate package to the youth’s needs. If the youth was aiming for paid employment with a business and needed to strengthen and upgrade his/her skills and knowledge, then they would continue on to advanced skills training. The youth that were planning on self-employment were provided with non-formal economic education modules that were introduced through structured sessions and facilitated discussions with NGO facilitators. Youth also received support from various community resource people that were identified in the community mapping who provided them business guidance as well as technical trainings and linkages to local savings and credit groups.
Working With Families to Start Micro-Enterprises or Livelihood Activities

While facilitating the social and academic mainstreaming of CAAFAG children is an enormous achievement, support for one school year is often not enough for children in difficult circumstances. Children seen as over-age returning to school or those from the poorest families face severe economic pressures and are expected to contribute to the family’s livelihood. As the beneficiaries continue to higher grades, the school fees and all other related expenses significantly increase. One of the more sustainable ways of ensuring that youth stay in school is to focus support on promotion of family livelihoods. Increasing family incomes helps prevent children ending up in exploitative situations such as child labor, trafficking and a further association with conflict, while giving families the flexibility to make their children’s academic dreams a reality.

In addition to the educational services, under the agreed reintegration package families of the neediest CAAFAG and children affected by conflict were supported to increase their income generation efforts. CAAFAG who live independently were also given this extra support. These prioritized youth and their families were supported with livelihood development training, in-kind material support and linkages to savings and credit groups. Income generation with families is considered as a major strategy for improving families’ economic status to enable their children to continue their studies after the program and reduce exploitative situations such as child labor, trafficking and further association with conflict. The most successful income generating activities were agriculture-based businesses, tailoring, electronic repair and small retail shops.
From Soldier to Dairy Farmer

With a beaming smile, BC Bohora’s mother offers her visitors creamy homemade yogurt. “It’s fresh. The buffalo we bought using the program’s financial support had a calf!” she says.

Through the CAAFAG reintegration package, families of CAAFAG who return home are offered support for income generation activities. BC is a returning CAAFAG. During the conflict, BC’s home in Badagaon VDC was situated in a very active Maoist belt of Salyan District. Since the sixth grade, he was involved with the party, attending programs in the community, and at school. BC’s childhood dream was to become a soldier, and, in the ninth grade, he left to join the People’s Liberation Army. But his dreams were dashed, he explains, “I thought I’d be a soldier, have a job and I heard I could even be part of the national army and have a regular salary. But after I was verified to be too young, I asked for holidays to return home. I never went back. I had to make a decision – nothing I dreamed of was happening, and I was missing out on my education.”

When he returned, BC had to repeat the ninth grade. BASE Salyan, World Education’s local partner, identified him as a CAAFAG and he received school support. BC regrets that he missed a year, realizing he could have been taking the exam for the School-Leaving Certificate this year with his friends. Still, he’s now more determined to complete high school. At home, he’s already got a 1-year-old daughter to look out for.

BASE also arranged for a member of the Bohora household to take a week long training at the District Veterinary Office and learn about proper livestock care, including fodder, food rations, grain, water and shed management, and how to handle internal and external parasites. A component of the training also addressed income generation, offering tips around hygienic production and pasteurization - by boiling the milk to kill germs, how to make better yogurt, and how to market the products. The Bohoras decided that since BC is educated, he should take the training and share the information with his family.

To support BC’s family – an extended family of 13 members – BASE suggested they keep a few goats to breed and earn from. BASE provided 8,000 rupees towards the initial investment. Previously, the Bohoras had a buffalo, but when they could no longer afford its upkeep, they sold the animal. When presented with BASE’s offer, since they had some experience tending buffaloes, they decided to add 2,000 rupees on top to buy a pregnant buffalo. “Plus, a buffalo gives milk to make milk products and the dung can be used as fertilizer,” reasons BC’s mother, explaining their decision to rear buffalo instead of goats, and adds, “We were buying milk and yogurt for the kids, but couldn’t afford any for ourselves. Now there’s plenty to go around!”
Major challenges for Income Generation Efforts

- **Long-term Commitment** - Some income generation activities such as goat and buffalo-raising require several years before they reach full productivity and generate profits but potential earnings are high. Families are often in need of quick income and are not willing to invest time and energy without witnessing fast profits. Livestock raising also requires technical training, proper housing of livestock and an agreeable climate. For technical aspects of this livelihood support and close collaboration between the program participants and the District Veterinary Office is needed for these businesses to thrive.

- **Technical Skill Training Vital Factor for Success** - Families who receive income generation support need to get appropriate skill training related to their livelihood or enterprise. Without technical training and support it is hard for them to properly engage in their new livelihood initiative or gain maximum profits.

- **Dysfunctional Families** - Some guardians and parents that have received support for income generation in the past have misused the funds and diverted them to meet daily expenditures. To prevent diversion of funds the CAAFAG program only provides in-kind support. The cooperatives are providing them cash support which can easily lead to a misuse of the funds. The program staff have been working closely with the cooperatives to avoid these kinds of situations and mainstream the in-kind contribution approach.

Lessons learned for Income Generation Efforts

- **Need for Thorough Household Assessment** - Families will often identify familiar livelihoods such as goat raising and request support for this. Without sufficient access to fodder this is doomed to failure. Comprehensive assessments of the family and its available resources and what are the family members capable of is needed before selecting the most appropriate income generating activities.

- **Mobilization of other Stakeholders** - In order to help ensure the greatest success and profits from income generating initiatives close coordination and collaboration with government offices, local cooperatives and small-scale enterprises in the VDCs are an asset.

Supplementary Food Support for CAAFAG families

Courtesy of the World Food Programme (WFP), the program distributed food rations to all beneficiaries and their families including other vulnerable and marginalized households in the target districts. Altogether, the food support reached 14,000 children and families. The food rations were delivered twice during the program duration and each ration was sufficient for around three months.
Major challenges for food support

- The target communities are extremely poor and remote. Providing food support to a limited number of households often created frustration on behalf of other community members that felt that they should be supported as well.

Lessons learned for food support

- Starting as a program that is only targeting CAAFAG had a risky potential to even further ostracize these youth, but combining the educational and reintegration support with food distribution that benefits the larger community has a tremendous effect on these youth's long-term well-being as well as social and economic acceptance in their communities.
- The beneficiaries and their families who received food support were saved significant funds in times of severe food shortages. These funds were used as savings for the children's educational expenses, investment in new income generation/livelihood initiatives and payment for recovery costs for any losses occurred by poor medical conditions, natural disasters and conflict.
- The children/youth who are participating in vocational training or enrolled in the formal school are able to invest their entire time and efforts in their studies, without needing to worry about supporting themselves and their families.

Roles and responsibilities

Building capacity of NGO partners around reintegation of CAAFAG, UNICEF and the Working Group have co-ordinated closely to meet the needs of the thousands of CAAFAG back in the community. World Education’s NGO partners have been provided with extensive training to work with disadvantaged children and victims of conflict. These trainings were built upon to enable them to better meet the needs of CAAFAG children. The trainings were tailored to suit the different needs of the NGOs.
The following trainings were provided to the NGO partners

- Training on proposed educational activities, addressing social inclusion at the local level, referral for psychosocial care, income generation and long-term reintegration needs.
- An intensive vocational process orientation provided in each target district for partner staff. During this orientation they were walked through the many steps required for a successful vocational training placement. Theoretical knowledge was supplemented by practical visits to local bazaars to conduct resource mapping and market surveys.

Services that were provided by other stakeholders (government, NGOs)

- The NGO partner *Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO)* has provided training on psychosocial care for CAAFAG to all the NGO partners in the target districts.
- Government line agencies, co-operatives, mothers groups, School Management Committees, Parent Teachers Association, Chambers of Commerce and local businesses all helped support youth to stay in school or access technical training, credit to start a business or access work opportunities.
- **Child Protection Committees** - Each of the CAAFAG program districts has a basic child protection network with varying gaps in its coverage and ability to support children in difficult circumstances. The program emphasized the engagement of more stakeholders in the district child protection networks by working with the *District Child Welfare Boards* as well as other district level line agencies.
- **Youth/Child Clubs** - While the provision of support to vulnerable youth has been integral for their reintegration, more is needed to ensure they are supported to stay in school or to access employment after vocational training. As part of the program activities, small grants were given to ten youth groups or children’s clubs in each of the target districts in order to undertake activities to promote peace using a youth-led approach and focusing on issues of social conflict and reconciliation. The Youth Clubs are responsible for community events focused on child protection issues such as: speech contests, school interactions on child rights, cultural song and dance competitions and school debates. All these activities are focused on reintegration of CAAFAG and promotion of social and economic support to children of lower castes and minority groups.
Specific trends in this sector that appear in certain geographic regions

Western Hills
Of the CAAFAG identified in this region, the majority were in the 15-18 age group or older than 18 (92%) by the time they received services. The majority of CAAFAG beneficiaries in this region were Dalit (52%), Brahman/Chettri (31%), and Janajati (17%). As for their role in armed groups, 26% were cultural artists, 23% were in other supportive roles, 15% were combatants and 14% were messengers. As for the reasons to joining the armed group, 24% joined because of peer pressure, 14% had a cultural interest, for 13% it was an option to get out of poverty, 12% joined out of ideology, 9% were abducted, 9% were forced to take part in training and 8% were convinced by another family member.

Specific challenges and lessons learned in the region:
- Transportation from the district headquarters to other areas in the district is very difficult in comparison to other parts of the country.
- CAAFAG beneficiaries are scattered in remote villages.
- Beneficiaries are of different ages and ethnic groups and have different interests and needs. The limited opportunities and facilities in the district for training, employment and income generation create difficulties in meeting those needs and aspirations.
- Training facilities are extremely limited in these districts and in many cases training must be provided in the district headquarters and even outside the district. This increases the cost for each beneficiary as they also need residential facilities, transportation and food support.
- Communications to plan trainings and connect beneficiaries can be difficult.
- Remote areas with scattered beneficiaries need more staff. With limited staffing it is difficult to provide monitoring and follow-up needed by beneficiaries to cover large and scattered geographical areas.
- The vocational trainers available in villages areas can provide basic training but are not skillful enough to provide advanced vocational skills training.
- Many CAAFAG in these districts demand computer training, a challenging vocation with few employment opportunities.

"Besides the traditional, I can prepare the designs and new trendy clothes which are in demand by the people in the village."

(CAAFAG tailoring in Myagdi District)
Mid Western Hills

In the mid-western hills many of CAAFAG are now above 18 (54%) or in the 15-17 (45%) age group. Within the armed forces, 46% were cultural artists, 33% were combatants and the remaining 21% were in other supportive roles. In terms of caste/ethnic representation, 42% were Brahman/Chhetri, 36% Dalit and 19% were Janajati. The reasons CAAFAG gave for joining the forces, 25% joined out of ideology, 24% because of peer pressure, 21% because of poverty and 20% had cultural interests.

Specific challenges and lessons learned in the mid-western hills

- Vocational training facilities are limited and this discourages youth from signing up as vocational trainees in this region in comparison to other regions.
- CAAFAG beneficiaries are scattered in remote VDCs and transportation is a challenge.
- Most of the vocational trainees attended computer and tailoring training as these are skills that can be used in businesses in the market areas.

Central Hills

The central region saw far fewer young CAAFAG and a higher percent that were Janajati. A majority of CAAFAG were above 18 years of age (74%) when first receiving services. In terms of caste/ethnic representation, 59% of the CAAFAG were Janajati, 28% were Brahman/Chhetri and 11% were Dalit. Within the forces 35% were combatants, 28% were cultural artists and the remaining were in other support roles. As for the reasons for joining the forces, 30% joined because of peer pressure, 25% because of ideology and 17% had a cultural interest. It is noticeable that in this region there were very few cases of abduction or forced recruitment.

Specific challenges and lessons learned in the central hills

- Transportation and access in this region is relatively easy in comparison to other areas as it is close to the capital. This accessibility helped former CAAFAG access an increased pool of vocational trainings and later to find jobs.
- Communications and transportation facilitated the program in this region.
- Self-employed youth found it easier to earn profit from new business initiatives as there is a large and accessible market.

"The Program gave me skill training in computers. After completing the training I got a job in the District Development Office and am able to earn money."

(CAAFAG, Orkha/dunga District)
Eastern Hills

The eastern hills had the highest representation of Janajatis among the CAAFGAG. Like the central region they were mainly above 18 years of age (74%) when enrolled in the program followed by the 15-17 age group (24%). In terms of caste/ethnic representation, 65% were Janajati, 24% are Dalit and 11% are Brahman/Chettri. While in armed groups 36% were combatants, 20% were cultural artists and the remaining were in other support roles. CAAFGAG gave as reasons for joining armed groups, 31% joined because of peer pressure, 27% were abducted or forced to join the training, 11% joined because of ideology and 9% had a cultural interest.

Specific challenges and lessons learned in the eastern hills

- There is large unmet need of CAAFGAG for services in the districts.
- Transportation is extremely difficult and there is no access to the main highway and between the districts headquarter and the VDCs.
- Limited numbers of training and employment opportunities.
- Some innovative businesses are created by CAAFGAG in the districts such as juice making, stick making and solar house wiring. This is partly consequence from the lack of traditional vocations that force CAAFGAG to be more creative regarding their livelihood opportunities.
- Some of the vocational trainees found jobs outside the country, using the learned skills (e.g. cooking, house wiring).
- There is a large prevalence of child porters in these districts and as a result of the program services, the numbers of child porters have been reduced and the children who were previously involved in this labor are now engaged in school or vocational training.
- Coordination and linkages with other district stakeholders is good.

"I learned that without any skills, you cannot do anything. I have been facing many problems but my heart told me that I should have a skill, so I chose art and painting. I have been working hard. In the future, I would like to open an art center in my village."

(CAAFGAG in Salyan District)
Best practices / recommendations

- **Promoting Independence and Linkages** - Before starting their own business initiative, many beneficiaries believed that they could only succeed if they received a large endowment for their business investment. After participating in the BDS training, they realized that they can build successful businesses with a small investment. Through this training, they learned how to do a profit/loss analysis, make linkages and gained knowledge on market management.

- **Follow Up** - Close documentation, follow-up and record keeping of beneficiaries who started their own business should be improved.

- **Economic Literacy** - The beneficiaries who finish vocational training and start their self-microenterprise are using the World Education developed career planning modules. In some cases it is not sufficient for these beneficiaries as they do not have basic math and economic literacy skills. It is therefore recommended to integrate economic education NFE modules to the vocational training provided to youth who need this extra support.

- **Positive behavior towards returning students** - Prior to the enrollment of former CAAFAG, teachers were reluctant to register these children in school. Most of the children were over age for the grades that they were enrolling in and the teachers/ principals were afraid that they would negatively affect the atmosphere in the classroom. The program teams focused heavily on sensitization sessions with the school teachers and principals around the enrollment of CAAFAG. The DEOs in the target districts also sent letters to the schools to encourage them to enroll the children. The support for the school that was given for every CAAFAG re-enrolled also helped to get positive reactions and sense of responsibility for these youth’s future. The program team invested a major effort to get teachers, student groups and community members to support these youth to return to school.

- **Scale of Support to Schools** - In schools where few CAAFAG are enrolled, the financial support for infrastructure is not sufficient enough for the school to develop any meaningful infrastructure project.

- **Child Protection Network** - Local Child Protection Committees and Youth Clubs acted as important advocates and mentors assisting community members to know more about the program and encouraging CAAFAG to pursue their education. These groups have also started developing linkages with savings and credit groups, mothers groups, Forest User Groups and local Child Clubs. If the program can invest in strengthening these groups, they will continue
functioning and will be able to leverage more funding for supporting these children. The sustainability of these groups is challenging but it is essential to continue supporting them for the effective reintegration of CAAFAG and the sustainability of child protection efforts.

- **Capacity for Child Protection Enhanced** - Since starting to be supported by the program, Child Protection Committees now feel more responsible for child rights issues in their communities. These committees are now more active in organizing different awareness and sensitization programs focusing on reintegration of CAAFAG and providing support to vulnerable children in their communities.

- **CAAFAG With Unmet Needs** - In the past, CAAFAG were insecure and reluctant to expose themselves and join the program. They now feel more confident and secure at the community level and more CAAFAG express their willingness and interest to join the program. The partners find it difficult to keep up with the demand and provide educational services to all the eligible youth in their districts.

- **Role of District Education Office and Government Line Agencies For Sustainability** - It is important to coordinate with the District Education Office and other stakeholders to allocate annual budget to continue providing scholarships, training, technical help and other services for the supported children.

- **Role of Community Based Organizations for Sustainability** - In order to ensure the full reintegration of CAAFAG some children will need long-term support. The program should focus on coordination with local stakeholders (PTAs, SMCs, Student Unions and youth groups) and combine efforts to leverage additional funding from other organizations.
World Education Brighter Futures partner NGOs providing services for Children Associated With Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG).

- Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN)
- Samaj Sewa Samuha (SSS)
- Nepal Education and Social Development Organization Nepal (NESDO)
- Rural Environment and Empowerment Center (REEC)
- Backward Society Education (BASE)
- Jana Sewa Samuha Nepal (JSSN)

The Brighter Futures Program is an eight year initiative supported by the USDOL with matching support from UNICEF, WFP and private donors to eliminate child labor though education. Over eight years the project has provided educational and other support to 43,291 children working in the worst forms of child labor in Nepal and 72,140 children at risk.

Child Labour Status Report 2009 prepared by World Education and its NGO partners