Adolescents have distinct experiences in armed conflict, distinct needs and distinct capacities for recovering. They are heads of household. They mentor and tutor other children and provide friendship and companionship for one another. They generate a livelihood for themselves and their families, and take on leadership roles. These attributes must be increasingly seen and addressed.¹

Perhaps most importantly, adolescents are at a stage in their development when, for the first time, they are actively seeking to attach meaning to their lives. Failure to provide adolescents with a positive and productive sense of purpose during the upheaval of armed conflict leaves them despairing and vulnerable to those who would seek to manipulate them, pulling them into the conflict and exploiting and harming them in other ways.²

15.1. Introduction

The situation for adolescents and youth has been and continuous to be a neglected and underfunded area, and there is limited data on adolescents. The Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children noted that if the international community does not adequately begin to focus efforts to provide for all the particular needs that adolescents have, which also needs to be identified, there is a risk that this negligence will lead to “the perpetuation of cycles of poverty, rights abuses and armed conflict by a generation that has lost its innocence and a sense of what it means to be an integral and important part of a peaceful society”.³ It is necessary to identify all of the adolescents’ social, economic, political, psycho-

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¹ Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, Untapped potential: Adolescents affected by armed conflict, 2000, p. 1
² Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, Untapped potential: Adolescents affected by armed conflict, 2000, p. 3
logical, physical and spiritual needs, the Women’s Commission has argued, as a way to develop appropriate interventions and make funding available also to adolescents as their specific situation and needs are properly understood.\textsuperscript{4} Further, the Women’s Commission has importantly been suggesting that the Office of the SRSG-CAAC should also pay particular attention to adolescents and separately analyse as well as advocate for their situation in order to enhance their visibility and to be able to develop better ways to assist them as they are a distinct group from children.\textsuperscript{5}

A definition of adolescents is difficult to determine, and there are several definitions that are being used by different communities, regions, countries and the international community. An individual is a child until 18 years, but there is no definition on adolescents which also makes it difficult to address the needs of this group. In this context the definition of adolescents that the Women’s Commission put forward includes a consideration of their needs:\textsuperscript{6}

- \textit{Chronologically,} pertaining to a period of life between certain ages.
- \textit{Functionally,} involving a process of transition from childhood to adulthood, marked by certain rituals or physical changes.
- \textit{Culturally,} in a societal context.

The Kenyan Parliament established in 2006 the Kenyan National Youth Policy (NYP), in which “youth” are defined as persons between 15–30 years of age.\textsuperscript{7} One of NYP’s policy recommendations was that a National Youth Council (NYC) be formed, and in August 2010 the National Youth Council Act was passed by the Parliament, but its implementation has been delayed.\textsuperscript{8} The National Youth Council Act defines youth as being between 15–35 years of age, and individual members are appointed to the National Youth Council to implement the youth policy. One of the positive consequences with having a national policy on youth and a national youth council is that it is now established that youth as a group is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{4} Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, Untapped potential: Adolescents affected by armed conflict, 2000, p. 5
  \item \textsuperscript{5} Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, Untapped potential: Adolescents affected by armed conflict, 2000, p. 70
  \item \textsuperscript{6} Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, Untapped potential: Adolescents affected by armed conflict, 2000, p. 3
  \item \textsuperscript{7} Wamuyu, Muthee, M., Hitting the Target, Missing the Point: Youth Policies and Programmes in Kenya, Unpublished Paper, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington D.C., December 2010, p. 5, 21
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