

**Who know best? Children do!**  
**How children evaluate the effects  
of a War Child programme**



---

# **Who know best? Children do!**

## **How children evaluate the effects of a War Child programme**

---



### **colofon**

**Text:** Lotte Claessens, Donatien de Graaff: War Child Holland

**Editing:** Elise Griede, Brechtje van Lith: War Child Holland

**Research Funding:** Frijling Prins Foundation / Ars Donandi Foundation

*This report was published with the support of the following sponsors:*

**Design and lay out:** Wrikontwerp, Utrecht, [www.wrik.com](http://www.wrik.com)

**Print:** Ricoh, Netherlands, [www.ricoh.nl](http://www.ricoh.nl)

**Photo's:** Rebke Klokke (p 14/15 and 24/25), Geert Snoeijer (p 2, 2nd and 4th picture) and War Child Holland

**Translation and copyediting:** Clare Donald

*With special thanks to:*

Prof. Dr. Frits Boer; Prof. Dr. Mark J.D. Jordans; Prof. Dr. Tom van Yperen;  
Dr. Henk Smeijsters, Leo de Nobel, Ans de Jager, the children and  
parents/caregivers who participated in the pilot study and our Uganda  
staff who assisted in the pilot study.

War Child Holland  
Van Ostradestraat 149  
1073 TK Amsterdam  
The Netherlands  
[info@warchild.nl](mailto:info@warchild.nl)

*Please also visit: [www.warchild.nl](http://www.warchild.nl) / [www.warchildholland.org](http://www.warchildholland.org)*

## **'Now I trust others'**

I DEAL participant, girl, 14 years old, Uganda



# **Who know best? Children do!**

## **How children evaluate the effects of a War Child programme**

*With this report, War Child Holland publishes the findings of a pilot study conducted in Northern Uganda in 2009. In this study, a child-friendly monitoring and evaluation toolkit was used to measure the effectiveness of War Child's creative life skills method, I DEAL, for groups of children and young people in conflict-affected areas.*

---

## Table of Content

PREFACE	5
SUMMARY	7
INTRODUCTION	9
<b>1. THE WAR IN NORTHERN UGANDA</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1 History of the war	11
1.2 Consequences for children and young people	11
<b>2. WAR CHILD'S LIFE SKILLS METHOD I DEAL</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Life skills intervention	12
2.2 I DEAL programme theory	12
<b>3. MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LIFE SKILLS METHOD I DEAL</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 Introduction	17
3.2 Challenges in measuring effectiveness	17
3.3 The development of a child-focused and participatory evaluation tool	18
3.4 The M&E toolkit: four exercises for participatory monitoring and evaluation	20
<b>4. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH IN NORTHERN UGANDA</b>	<b>22</b>
4.1 Research method	22
4.2 Personal goals: do children think that I DEAL is effective for them?	22
4.3 Quizzes and module evaluations: how much knowledge and skills do children gain from I DEAL modules?	26
4.4 Sustainability of intervention effects: results of the impact mapping sessions	27
4.5 Main result: knowledge and skills positively contribute to children's personal goals	28
4.6 Contra-indications: results that did not support the hypothesis	29
4.7 Evaluation of the M&E toolkit with the I DEAL facilitators	30
<b>5. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>6. DISCUSSION</b>	<b>33</b>
6.1 Limitations and recommendations	33
6.2 Next steps: Global participatory research with children	35

---

## **PREFACE**

Eliminating the effects of war from a child: it's easily said, but how do you actually go about it? War Child is convinced that the best way to help children is with a future-oriented approach that enables them to regain control of their life. With this objective in mind, War Child developed the I DEAL method, whereby children learn to manage their emotions, deal with conflict and take steps towards finding constructive solutions together with adults and peers. Nowadays, however, simply presenting a creative method of rendering assistance with enthusiasm is not enough. Governments and financiers will strongly question whether the method has been scientifically proven to work. War Child, too, would like to assess its own effectiveness.

This is a complicated issue for an organisation like War Child that conducts its work outside of the western world, because western ways of assessing the effectiveness of a method fall hopelessly short in an African country. To draw on one example – when you ask a child or his parents to indicate how great a certain problem is on a scale of 0 to 7, with the intention of measuring whether the problem improves over time, it emerges that individuals do not think in this way at all, rendering the question useless. This report offers an original and important alternative.

With this child friendly monitoring and evaluation toolkit, developed by a group of researchers at War Child, the question of evidence of effectiveness can be satisfied, but creatively, in keeping with the culture of the countries where War Child is active. For colleagues Mark Jordans, Henk Smeijsters, Tom van Yperen and I, the opportunity to offer research guidance for this project was both inspiring and rewarding.

### **Frits Boer**

*Emeritus Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the Amsterdam Medical Centre – the Bascule, the Netherlands*







---

## SUMMARY

### Background

The War Child I DEAL method was developed in 2006 and has since become a key component in War Child's psychological programming with children and young people in conflict areas. I DEAL provides theme-based group sessions to improve children and young people's psychosocial well-being through training in life skills, using a combination of creative and participatory techniques such as role-play, drawing, games and group discussions. The intervention consists of six I DEAL modules that address psychosocial themes such as identity, dealing with emotions, peer relations, relationships with adults, conflict and peace, and the future. Through I DEAL, War Child seeks to enhance the resilience of children and young people and improve their coping skills to better 'deal' with the challenges of every day life.

With I Deals success in different cultural contexts in for example War Child programmes in Uganda (Africa) and the Occupied Palestinian Areas (Gaza), the demand for evidence on 'what works' in the I DEAL method has grown - not only from donors and other stakeholders in the field, but also from within War Child. However, no research tool was available that was appropriate, creative, comprehensible and participative for children and at the same time provided as many results as possible. For instance, Western research tools tend to talk about children, not with children. Such tools also tend to focus on reducing negative personal characteristics, whereas War Child focuses on increasing positive characteristics, i.e. enhancing individual or environmental safeguards that help children cope with stressful life events.

### This pilot study

In 2008, War Child decided to develop a child friendly monitoring and evaluation toolkit, incorporating all the aforementioned characteristics, in order to measure the effects of I DEAL. The toolkit consists of four creative and participatory exercises:

- 1) Personal Goal:** children set their personal I DEAL intervention goals and evaluate them (for example: I would like to: deal with my fear of other people; have a trustful relationship with my father; have more friends);
- 2) Quizzes:** the knowledge and skills that children learn from each I DEAL module are measured in a fun and participatory way;
- 3) Module Evaluations:** during a group discussion, children assess the relevance and most significant elements of the I DEAL modules;
- 4) Impact Mapping:** significant changes in the process of I DEAL and their sustainability are measured in baseline, end of intervention and post-intervention exercises.

---

In a pilot study in northern Uganda in 2009, more than 500 children and 120 parents/ caregivers tested the child-friendly monitoring and evaluation toolkit. The central question of this study is: Are the specific knowledge and skills offered in I DEAL effective in helping children to reach their personal goals?

### **Results**

It was found that, in general, high levels of knowledge and skills were present in the I DEAL groups. Participants reported that what they had learnt from I DEAL supported them in their daily lives. It was also found that the majority of children reported that they reached their personal goals after the intervention period.

Overall, it was concluded that especially the close social relationships of children improved; i.e. their relationships with parents or caregivers and peers. Especially children, who set a goal related to improving their family relations, were found to benefit most from I DEAL.

The impact maps also showed how positive effects were still visible three months after completion of I DEAL and they revealed unexpected benefits from the intervention. The effects on family and community level that were reported by children and parents are likely to be strongly influenced by parents' involvement in the parallel sessions - called PARENT DEAL - for parents and caregivers. The fact that children with a personal goal on family level have the highest goal attainment scores supports this conclusion.

Results that do not support the hypothesis were also found. For example for the I DEAL module Conflict & Peace no strong relationship was found with the personal goal attainment of the participants. However, the lack of statistical relations between the module and personal goals does not necessarily mean that modules are not relevant in personal goal attainment. It could also be due to large variations between personal goals in the category, a lack of variation in quiz scores, or to other factors that influence children's personal goals.

### **Overall conclusion**

This pilot study demonstrates how a research tool that is tailor-made for a specific target group and context, that stimulates children to fully participate in the monitoring and evaluation process, can serve at the same time the quality of the intervention and measure its effectiveness.

# INTRODUCTION

## War Child Holland

War Child Holland (War Child) is an independent and impartial non-governmental organisation investing in a peaceful future for children affected by armed conflict. As a rights-based organisation, War Child empowers children and young people to change their future by protecting them from violence, abuse and exploitation, and by offering psychosocial support and stimulating quality education. The unique approach of War Child is characterized by the use of creative methods in all our activities, the promotion of children and young people's participation, and the inclusion of marginalized groups and conflict sensitivity. In our programmes we combine different intervention strategies to reach our goals: direct interventions, capacity building and advocacy.

War Child regards children and young people as resilient and resourceful agents who possess the strength to (re)build their lives. Working from this perspective, War Child has been developing interventions that strengthen children and young people's skills to deal with the stresses of armed conflict and its aftermath, improve adult support, peer interaction, a sense of normalcy and future prospect, and, ultimately, to create an environment of safety and peace. These protective factors are central to War Child programming, and form the basis of specific methodologies such as the life skills intervention I DEAL.

## I DEAL

The I DEAL method<sup>1</sup> was developed in 2006, and has since become a key component in War Child's psychological programming with children and young people. I DEAL provides theme-based group sessions to improve children and young people's psychosocial well-being through training in life skills, using a combination of creative and participatory techniques, such as role-play, drawing, games and group discussions. The intervention consists of six I DEAL modules that address psychosocial themes such as identity, dealing with emotions, peer relations, relationships with adults, conflict and peace, and the future.

## Monitoring & Evaluation Toolkit for I DEAL

With its success in different cultural contexts, the demand for evidence on 'what works' in I DEAL has grown, not only from donors and other stakeholders in the field, but also from within War Child. In 2008, War Child started a research trajectory in order to develop a research tool to measure the effects of I DEAL in a way that suits the non-Western contexts War Child is working in, as well as our target group of children and young people, and the creative, participatory approach of the intervention. As a result, a monitoring &

---

<sup>1</sup> I DEAL is on line available on: [www.warchildlearning.org](http://www.warchildlearning.org)

---

evaluation (M&E) toolkit for I DEAL was developed. This evaluation tool consists of four main creative and participatory exercises and is unique, as it is specifically designed for children and can be carried out as an integrated part of the intervention.

### **Structure of the report**

This report describes the pilot study of this tool in War Child Holland programmes in Uganda. The first chapter describes the situation of children and young people in Northern Uganda, while the second chapter presents a more detailed picture of the I DEAL intervention. This is followed by chapter 3, which focuses on the research trajectory and the development of the child friendly M&E toolkit for I DEAL. Chapter 4 describes the pilot study in Uganda, followed with a conclusion (chapter 5). Chapter 6 finalises the report with a discussion, limitations and recommendations.



---

# 1. THE WAR IN NORTHERN UGANDA

## 1.1 HISTORY OF THE WAR

Northern Uganda has been the scene of more than twenty years of conflict between the rebel group Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government. The war in Northern Uganda is characterized by widespread and systematic violations of human rights, including torture, sexual violence, mutilations, and the destruction of houses and schools. The worst atrocities of the war include the killings of thousands of civilians, the displacement of 1.8 million people -mainly ethnic Acholi- (this is 80 percent of the population of Northern Uganda) and the abduction of over 30,000 children to serve as child soldiers and sex slaves. Enduring physical and socio-economical insecurity, faltering government structures, massive forced and voluntary displacement, and a large dependence on humanitarian assistance for subsistence has resulted in a highly vulnerable society in Northern Uganda.

Since late 2005, several efforts to establish peace in the region have been initiated, without positive results as yet. However, since the peace talks between the LRA and the government of Uganda began, the security situation has improved remarkably in the Northern districts. With the relatively peaceful situation, the population has started to move back from Internally Displaced Person camps (IDP camps) to the closer "satellite" or "transit" camps, or to their villages of origin. In the Acholi region, more than 70 percent of the population have returned to their villages of origin. However, in the process of returning, new problems are emerging: services like food distribution in camps are being reduced or have stopped; lack of services in the transit camps and villages; insufficient government support for returnees; family separations in the return process; and violent tensions between returnees about landownership.

## 1.2 CONSEQUENCES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The humanitarian, social and economic costs of the conflict, and the ensuing insecurity, have had a high impact on all children and young people in Northern Uganda. About 60 percent of the population in Northern Uganda consists of children and young people due to a high population growth rate and many conflict- HIV/AIDS- and other disease- related deaths. The major problems for children as a result of insecurity, conflict, poverty, displacement, resettlement and failing government structures are violations of child rights such as lack of access to quality education, lack of a protective environment in communities and schools, and sexual abuse. Other problems include the lack of integration of formerly abducted children, changing social and cultural structures and values, increased levels of stress, trauma and psychological disorders, limited possibilities for safe play and expression, lack of income generation skills and employment, lack of parental care and supervision, and lack of exchange and interaction between divided groups of children and young people.



## 2. WAR CHILD'S LIFE SKILLS METHOD I DEAL

### 2.1 LIFE SKILLS INTERVENTION

I DEAL is War Child's creative life skills method for groups of children (age 11-15) and young people (age 16-20) in conflict-affected areas. The intervention provides a theme-based workshop cycle to strengthen children and young people's resilience through training in life skills, using a combination of creative and participatory techniques, such as role-play, drawing, games and group discussions. In I DEAL different psychosocial themes are addressed, such as identity, dealing with emotions, peer relations, relationships with adults, conflict and peace, and the future. Each theme is addressed in a module that consists of two to five sessions. A session always starts with an introduction game, after which the participants discuss relevant issues related to the theme and train social skills through different creative exercises. The sessions have specific working goals that cover the three domains of psychosocial well-being; skills and knowledge, emotional and social wellbeing, as identified by UNICEF.

### 2.2 I DEAL PROGRAMME THEORY

The basis of the I DEAL method is the so called ecological model that is underlying War Child's wider programming, as well as the creative and participatory approach that characterizes War Child interventions.

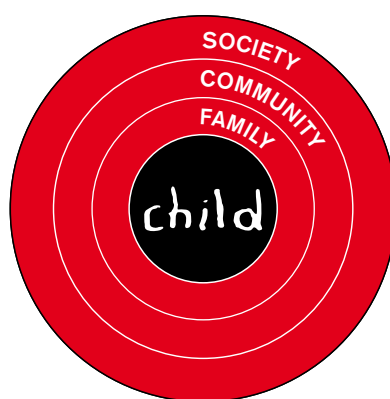


Figure 1: Ecological model

#### **Ecological model**

The ecological model shows how children are embedded in their social environment and how they are in constant interaction with parents/caregivers, family, community and

---

society. This means that the development of a child is not only determined by individual characteristics but also by social contextual factors such as the relationship with key adults, the school environment and the wider society. Therefore the focus of I DEAL is not only on personal skills and qualities but also on the child in relation to his or her social environment, for example focusing on relationships with peers and adults. In Uganda I DEAL is combined with parallel parent groups in PARENTS DEAL, in order to stimulate lasting change in the lives of children, young people and their families.

### **Protective factors**

War Child seeks to enhance the resilience of children and young people through interventions that strengthen internal and external protective factors; factors that buffer the effects of war.

Protective factors are individual or environmental safeguards that help children cope with stressful life events. Internal protective factors are the coping mechanisms of children themselves. External protective factors include the child's social and physical environment such as support from adults and peers, a sense of normalcy and future prospects, and safety and peace. As risk and threat levels rise and protective factors are broken down, the resilience of children and young people diminishes.

Working from this perspective, War Child has been developing interventions such as I DEAL that strengthen protective factors, which help children and young people deal with the stresses of armed conflict and its aftermath. War Child focuses on five protective factors that are of particular importance for children and young people living in (post) conflict areas:

- Constructive coping mechanisms: Skills that enable children to deal with difficult experiences and situations in life;
- Adult support: Emotional, physical and moral support that parents and caregivers give to their children;
- Positive peer (group) interaction: Children have positive relationships with other children of their age-group;
- Sense of normalcy and future prospect: Children have a daily structure, feel the situation has somehow normalised and have a positive outlook on the future;
- Safety and peace: Stable and peaceful environment.

I DEAL is mainly focused on strengthening constructive coping mechanisms, or life skills, and on positive peer interaction.



**I DEAL participant, girl, 12 years old:**

*"I feel very positive and proud when I think about my class mates. I used to sit alone and did not care much about my class mates. Now I feel I am part of the group and I play with my class mates, I enjoy being with them".*





---

### **The power of creative and participatory methodology**

The underlying assumption of I DEAL is that creative and participatory methods offer effective ways to learn physical, emotional and social life skills, helping children to express emotions, and communicate and build relationships. During creative activities, children learn, for example, social rules, gender roles and the possibilities and limitations of their own bodies in order to solve practical problems, relate to others and confront difficult situations. Participatory approaches allow children to express their views and opinions, and to learn through interaction and experimentation.

### **Life skills education can transform behaviour**

The I DEAL intervention is based on the idea that new knowledge and coping skills of children and young people on specific psychosocial themes can lead to positive changes in their social-emotional behaviour. By discussing the I DEAL module themes, sharing personal experiences and practicing social skills, children will be able to transform their behaviour and better relate to their social environment. In this respect it is important that I DEAL is implemented as a total package and by trained professionals (e.g. trained community workers) in order to establish the required knowledge and skills that can ultimately lead to improved social attitudes and behaviour.

---

#### **I DEAL participant, girl, 13 years old:**

*One year ago I used not to listen to my parents. I had bad friends and I did not do what my parents asked me to do. If they sent me to work in the garden, I went to my friends. Together we were hiding in the bush and picked mangos. Before going home, I put my legs in the mud so my parents were thinking I just came back from the garden! When I heard of the I DEAL workshops in our class, I wanted to go to school again. I have learnt about good and bad friends. I do not see my bad friends anymore but made new ones in school. I listen to my parents and talk to other children about what we learned during the I DEAL session. I have passed now and I do perform well in class!*

---



---

## 3. MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LIFE SKILLS

### METHOD I DEAL

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the development of I DEAL in 2006, the intervention has become a key component of War Child programming. With I Deals success in different cultural contexts in for example War Child programmes in Uganda (Africa) and the Occupied Palestinian Areas (Gaza), the demand from donors and external stakeholders has grown to demonstrate the effects of I DEAL on children and young people. Furthermore, at War Child we are continually learning about the relevance, efficiency and impact of our work. When evaluating our programming, and I DEAL in particular, we try to answer the question 'Are we doing the right things?' by focusing on the relevance of our activities and how they relate to children's needs and rights. We also look at the question 'Are we doing things right?' by monitoring and evaluating our activities, and the effectiveness and meaning of them for children and young people.

---

**War Child I DEAL facilitator:**

*"Donors often require that we report on the number of I DEAL sessions we carry out and the amount of children we reach. What I am more interested in, is to learn about the enormous growth in confidence and self esteem that we see on a daily basis in the children we work with in I DEAL."*

---

#### 3.2 CHALLENGES IN MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

War Child underlines the importance of collecting evidence on 'what works' in I DEAL; however, in practice it has proved difficult to evaluate the effects on these type of interventions scientifically. We do not work in a laboratory or an experimental setting, but in conflict zones. Tension exists between the high standards for scientific evaluations and the dynamic environments in which I DEAL takes place, and the specific target group of children and young people we are working with. As this study shows, War Child is committed to finding the balance between scientific standards and field conditions.

When evaluating psychosocial interventions, questionnaires are the most commonly-used instruments to measure child well-being and behaviour, as changes can be studied in a

---

structured way and scores can be compared between children. However, as scientific questionnaires are mostly developed in Europe and the USA, they are often not applicable in the non-Western contexts War Child works in. These are some of the challenges we face:

- **Misfit between I DEAL goals and the available questionnaires:** questionnaires often measure psychosocial well-being as an absence of problem behaviour or mental illness, instead of focussing on strengthened life skills and positive social behaviour.
- **Lack of child-friendly research methods:** Questionnaires often do not account for illiteracy or a lack of analytical skills (e.g. children not being able to choose an answer on a 5-point scale). Moreover, talking with children about individual feelings, emotions or well-being is, in some contexts, uncommon and therefore not understood, or even accepted.
- **Ethical constraints:** conducting long, heavy research activities in a setting where children are still confronted with the consequences of war is far from desirable, as well as the use of control groups in experimental studies in areas where the need for interventions is widespread.
- **Qualitative methods are not sufficient:** focus groups, line debates, and Most Significant Change are more flexible for cultural adjustment and can often be used in a child-friendly way. The drawback of qualitative methods is that analysis of the narrative information is very time-consuming and cannot always be used to draw hard conclusions on, for example, the level of knowledge and skills of children as a result of the intervention.

### 3.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CHILD-FOCUSED AND PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION TOOL

In 2008, War Child started a research trajectory to develop a new evaluation tool for I DEAL that meets the challenges associated with research in developmental contexts and our principles in research with children. As a result, a unique monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tool has been developed that is specifically designed for children and can be integrated in the I DEAL intervention. Four basic principles were guiding during the development of the tool:

---

### *1. Child-focused and participatory approach*

War Child sees children as participants in research, rather than subjects of research. The child-friendly research tool for I DEAL empowers children to actively participate in monitoring and evaluation by setting their own goals and expressing their views on the effectiveness of the weekly workshops. Measuring effects in a child-focused way implies that research is conducted in a way that is relevant and fun for children, and that it connects to their experience. Therefore the exercises have a creative and participatory character. By involving children as the main stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation, the best evidence on the quality, relevance and effects of I DEAL are collected.

### *2. Focus on learning: strengthening evaluative practice*

Evaluating I DEAL should not be a one-off event to 'prove' the effects of the intervention, but rather an ongoing process to stimulate learning and reflection. The purpose of the M&E tool is to learn about the success factors of the intervention. War Child looks beyond the question 'Does I DEAL work, yes/no?' and aims to learn about how the intervention works and for whom in a specific context. Therefore, the evaluation tool not only provides information on the end results of I DEAL, but also on the process of the intervention, by looking at the relevance and contextual meaning of the life skills course for participants and the way they perceive the intervention effectiveness.

### *3. Research integrated in I DEAL*

The evaluation tool is designed as an integrated part of the I DEAL intervention. All exercises are creative and participatory, and can therefore easily be integrated in the I DEAL workshops and implemented by national War Child staff. The tool helps the I DEAL facilitator to evaluate the intervention with the group and to control the quality and relevance of the workshops.

### *4. Complementing numbers with stories*

With the M&E toolkit, both quantitative information (figures) and qualitative (anecdotes, examples and stories) are collected. Where figures can provide a concrete and clear picture of improvement, stories and examples can give meaning to these figures. Throughout the intervention, the real life examples and anecdotes of children are central, enabling participants to learn from each other and I DEAL facilitators to continually improve their practice. Furthermore, the collected data can be analysed across multiple groups of children in order to provide more insight into the effectiveness, cultural meaning and relevance of I DEAL in a specific context.

### 3.4 THE M&E TOOLKIT: FOUR EXERCISES FOR PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) toolkit for I DEAL consists of four child-friendly and participatory M&E exercises:

- 1) **Personal Goal:** children set their personal intervention goals and evaluate them;
- 2) **Quizzes:** the knowledge and skills that children learn from each I DEAL module are measured in a fun and participatory way;
- 3) **Module Evaluations:** during a group discussion, children assess the relevance and most significant elements of the modules;
- 4) **Impact Mapping:** significant changes in the process of I DEAL and their sustainability are measured in baseline, end of intervention and post-intervention exercises.

*Ad 1: Personal Goal exercises: how effective is I DEAL for children?*

In determining the effectiveness of I DEAL, the perceived effectiveness of participants is seen as an important indicator. The aim of the Personal Goal exercises is to measure to what extent children indicate their ability to reach their personal goals as a result of the knowledge and skills they have learnt in I DEAL. In the first I DEAL module, all participants define a personal goal that they can realistically achieve through I DEAL and will work towards in the intervention period. A personal goal can be something about themselves or something in their social life (relationship with parents, peers or other adults), and participants express this goal in a creative way, for example in a drawing. In the last module of I DEAL, participants reflect upon this goal and determine to what extent and how they have reached it.

---

**War Child I DEAL facilitator:**

*"It is very empowering for children to set a personal goal. They become aware that they have the ability to change their situation. The personal goals also help me as a facilitator to focus more on children's individual needs. Knowing the issues children face in their daily life helps me to make the workshops more relevant to them."*

---

*Ad 2 and 3: Quizzes and module evaluation: what did the group learn from the module?* At the end of each thematic I DEAL module<sup>2</sup>, the facilitator assesses the level of skills and knowledge of the group with a fun quiz exercise. Each quiz consists of seven multiple-choice questions that reflect the session goals of the module. The facilitator makes three answering posts and all children individually choose their preferred answering post. The percentage of children who chose the correct answer is registered by the facilitator.

---

<sup>2</sup> The thematic I DEAL modules are: Dealing with Emotions; Peer Relations; Relationships with Adults; Conflict & Peace.



After each question the facilitator discusses the different answers with the group and explains the correct answer. The results of all questions lead to a total group score for a quiz. The quiz exercise is followed by a module evaluation, in which the facilitator uses a set of structured questions to facilitate a group discussion. The aim of this evaluation is to assess the most significant lessons learnt and the satisfaction of participants, based on their feedback of the module.

---

**War Child I DEAL facilitator:**

“The module evaluations create awareness in the group of the process they go through in the workshop cycle. Children feel confident to give feedback on the relevance of the theme for them and to reflect on significant learnings in the module.”

---

*Ad 4: Impact mapping: what are the significant changes during I DEAL and how sustainable are they?*

The three Impact Mapping exercises consist of a baseline measurement, an end evaluation and a post-evaluation which takes place three months after closure. The purpose of the impact maps is, firstly, to visualize the main challenges of the group at the start of the intervention, secondly, to reflect upon the main lessons learnt and changes of the group at the end of I DEAL and, thirdly, to examine the sustainability of effects, and the changes or new developments in the group after closure of I DEAL. The aim of the Impact mapping exercises is to learn about the ‘successful ingredients’ in the process of I DEAL and to gain a better understanding of the sustainability of the lessons learnt and significant changes that participants experienced during the intervention.



---

## **4. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH IN NORTHERN UGANDA**

The central question in this study is: Are the knowledge and skills offered in I DEAL effective for children to reach their personal goals? The hypothesis is that the skills and knowledge from the themes have a positive influence on social functioning, which leads to the achievement of the personal goals that children set for themselves. We found both results that support the hypothesis and results that lack to support it.

### **4.1 RESEARCH METHOD**

The M&E tool was piloted from April to November 2009 in 13 I DEAL groups in the districts Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum and Lira in Northern Uganda. The study is a one-group, pre-post design involving 510 children between the ages of 11 and 15. Eight War Child social workers (facilitators) implemented the M&E toolkit in their I DEAL groups. The I DEAL groups comprised fourth and fifth grade school classes at eight primary schools that were selected in the War Child Uganda programme. The parents of the participants all gave informed consent for participation in I DEAL. The impact mapping exercise was also conducted with 120 parents or caregivers of participants in this research.

#### *Conducting the research*

Prior to the study, the eight facilitators received I DEAL monitoring and evaluation training on the implementation of the evaluation exercises and data registration. In all I DEAL groups the data on the different measures was collected during 17 weeks of the intervention. For all measures in this study the facilitators explained the purpose of the exercise and safeguarded confidentiality of the responses of the participants. Outcomes of the exercises were not communicated with the parents, caregivers or teachers of the I DEAL participants.

The following sections discuss the results of the personal goal exercises to test the hypothesis of the study.

### **4.2 PERSONAL GOALS: DO CHILDREN THINK THAT I DEAL IS EFFECTIVE FOR THEM?**

The personal goals that the participants set for themselves can be categorized into different types of goals: goals on a personal level, family level, peer level and school level. The

majority of the children reported to have reached their goal. In response to whether they had achieved their goal by the end of the intervention, 54.3% of the children indicated 'yes', 41.3% 'almost' and 4.4% 'no'. It was found that children with a goal related to *family* had the highest goal attainment scores.

**Table 1: Personal goal categories and examples**

	Children (N=431)
My goal is to... (examples)	%
<b>Personal level</b>	<b>40.1</b>
> ...overcome my shyness when I talk to people	
> ...deal with my temper and reduce fighting	
> ...deal with my fear of other people	
> ...be an example for other children	
<b>Family level</b>	<b>21.2</b>
> ...have a trustful relationship with my father	
> ...improve my relationship with my sisters	
> ...be more supportive to my mother	
<b>Peer level</b>	<b>19.7</b>
> ...spend more time with the children I like	
> ...have more friends	
> ...improve the relationship with boys/girls (opposite sex)	
> ...improve cooperation with other children	
<b>School level</b>	<b>14.4</b>
> ...overcome fear of teachers	
> ...improve school performance	
> ...have increased motivation for education	
> ...to become a head boy in school	
<b>Other</b>	<b>4.6</b>
> ...become a War Child worker	
> ...be a football player	





**I DEAL participant, boy, 13 years old:**

*"My personal goal is to have a better relationship with my father. I achieved my goal as nowadays we talk every day before bedtime about my school day. I feel my father cares more about me than before."*





---

**I DEAL participant, girl, 12 years old:**

*"My goal was to be less aggressive and become a role model for my brothers and sisters. Nowadays I greet my parents in a respectful way and help in the garden. I feel I am a good example for my siblings, but I can still improve on my temper."*

---

### **4.3 QUIZZES AND MODULE EVALUATIONS: HOW MUCH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS DO CHILDREN GAIN FROM I DEAL MODULES?**

Overall the quiz exercises showed high levels of knowledge and skills in the I DEAL groups. The module evaluations showed what children perceived as the most important knowledge and skills they learned in each module. This helped facilitators to assess the quality of their work.

Results of quizzes and module evaluations have been used to cross check the other findings.



**Table 2: Average group score in quiz and most important lesson from the module**

	Children (N=500)
	%
<b>Emotions</b>	<b>75</b>
> Improved ability to recognize emotions and know how to deal with them	
<b>Peer Relations</b>	<b>85</b>
> Improved gender relations	
<b>Adult Relations</b>	<b>91</b>
> Improved understanding of the roles and responsibilities between children and their caregivers	
<b>Conflict &amp; Peace</b>	<b>88</b>
> Increased forgiveness between group members.	

**I DEAL participant, girl, 13 years old, in the module evaluation Peer Relations:**

*"At the start of I DEAL I did not play much with boys in my class. Through the games in I DEAL I learned to talk with boys in a free way and I like it very much!"*

**I DEAL participant, boy, 13 years old, in the module evaluation Conflict & Peace:**

*"I learned to forgive other people and forget incidents that happened in the past"*

#### **4.4 SUSTAINABILITY OF INTERVENTION EFFECTS: RESULTS OF THE IMPACT MAPPING SESSIONS**

The impact mapping exercises showed the most significant lessons learnt and changes of the participants throughout the process and how they sustain in the months after the intervention. Overall, participants reported strong improvements in personal skills, knowledge, an increased feeling of wellbeing and improved relationships with parents (or caregivers), peers and the teacher. Three months after the intervention, most outcomes of the intervention were still present. Participants reported that, although some problems in class such as fighting and theft had not been completely resolved, the feeling of belonging to a group and positive interaction between group members continued to be present after the intervention. As most parents of the children in this study were involved in a parallel PARENTS DEAL intervention, children also reported changes related to their parents.

---

The impact mapping exercise shows the meaning of the new skills and knowledge for the participants; children indicate how they apply the knowledge and skills from I DEAL in their daily life and how this has changed them:

- > *I have gained more confidence; now I can talk in class without covering my mouth*
  - > *I have a better relationship with my father; every night we talk about my school day*
  - > *I have more respect for my teacher; when he asks me something, I do not run away*
  - > *The children in this group respect and trust each other; we really feel like a group now*
- 

This impact mapping exercise was also done with parents or caregivers from I DEAL participants who were involved in PARENTS DEAL groups to include their perspective on the effects of I DEAL. Besides improvements in the relationship with their child, parents also reported changes in the family and some unexpected effects in the community. Although these effects are the result of parents' involvement in the PARENTS DEAL, they are likely to influence the sustainability of the effects of I DEAL and are therefore also considered in this study.

---

Parents reported changes in the family and in the community:

- > *I have seen my child becoming much more supportive; he now helps at home*
  - > *We re-established storytelling at the campfire at night; an important traditional form of informal education for our children that disappeared in the years of war*
  - > *In our community there is now increased supervision of the children, something that we did not have in the camps*
  - > *We have promoted education in our community, especially for girls; we are already seeing a reduction in early marriages*
- 

#### **4.5 MAIN RESULT: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS POSITIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO CHILDREN'S PERSONAL GOALS**

The level of knowledge and skills of I DEAL participants was measured on a group level; this means that all children within one I DEAL group had the same quiz score for a specific theme. We asked children individually about the extent to which they had reached their personal goal. We tested our assumption that high levels of knowledge and skills in the different modules lead to children reaching their personal goals. This relation was tested statistically and two effects were found that support the hypothesis.

---

### 1. Modules Relationships with Adults and Emotions positively contribute to 'family' goals

Children with a personal goal related to *family* who belonged to I DEAL groups with high levels of knowledge and skills for the theme Relationships with Adults had significantly higher goal attainment than children in a low or average scoring group. For children with a goal related to *family* a relation with the theme Emotions was also found; children with higher levels of skills and knowledge for the theme Emotions are more likely to reach their personal goal.

---

Esme (13) has a goal related to *family*: *My goal is to improve the relationship with my mother*"

- > The module Relationships with Adults increases the chance that Esme reaches her goal
  - > The module Emotions is likely to increase the change that Esme reaches her goal
- 

### 2. Module Peer Relations positively contributes to 'peer' goals

Children with a personal goal related to *peers* who belonged to I DEAL groups with high levels of skills and knowledge for the theme Peer Relations had a significantly higher goal attainment than children with low level of skills and knowledge but not significantly higher than children in an average group.

---

Peter (11) has a goal related to *peers*: *My goal is to have more friends*"

- > The module Peer Relations increases the chance that Peter reaches his goal
- 

## 4.6 CONTRA-INDICATIONS: RESULTS THAT DID NOT SUPPORT THE HYPOTHESIS

1. No effect was found between the module Conflict & Peace and children's personal goals, despite the fact that children reported that the theme was relevant and important for them. The high overall quiz scores for the theme Conflict & Peace might explain the lack of statistical relation for this quiz, reducing the variation and thus the effects between participants.

2. Te personal goals of children that were related to personal level and school level showed no relation with specific I DEAL theme modules, although children did report to have reached these goals in I DEAL. The lack of any significant relation could be due to

---

the large variation between personal goals of the children in these categories, compared to the other goal types. For example, the subgroup goals related to school included goals ranging from a child's relationship with his or her teacher to school performance and individual behaviour in class. It could also mean that these types of personal goals (for example gaining trust or self-confidence) are influenced by aspects of different modules throughout I DEAL, rather than just by one specific module. It could also indicate that these goals are not so much influenced by the skills and knowledge of the I DEAL modules but rather by other factors that influence the intervention process, such as social dynamics, external changes or the fact that I DEAL takes place in school. This confirms the intended sphere of influence of I DEAL, which is mainly on social relations, and not on school functioning.

#### 4.7 EVALUATION OF THE M&E TOOLKIT WITH THE I DEAL FACILITATORS

Facilitators evaluated the implementation of the M&E toolkit and the information that was collected in the pilot study. Overall, the pilot and the M&E tool were evaluated positively. Most facilitators reported that the tool delivers valuable information that helped them select relevant themes with the group and guided them to focus more on individual needs of children. The module evaluations helped facilitators to control the quality of their work and to address relevant issues in the workshops. Facilitators commented that exercises were fun and empowering for participants and helped them to participate meaningfully in monitoring and evaluation. Exercises such as the personal goal exercise and the module evaluations increased trust between group members, as sharing their personal experiences stimulated recognition and understanding amongst them.

The length of some of the exercises, especially the individual-focused personal goal exercises, was a challenge for most facilitators, as they did not fit into the timeframe of the regular sessions and had to be carried out in separate sessions. Privacy issues also emerged in some groups as the sessions took place in schools where other children or schoolteachers could access the workshop space. Confidentiality issues were related to the fact that all participants in a group came from the same community and thus knew the people that other children shared confidential information about. Lastly, facilitators felt that the monitoring and evaluation of I DEAL should be linked with assessing the effectiveness of the Parent working groups, the parallel intervention for parents of I DEAL participants.

---

## 5. CONCLUSION

The central question in this pilot study is: Are the knowledge and skills offered in I DEAL effective for children to reach their personal goals? We found both strong indications and some contra-indications for this result.

It was found that, in general, high levels of knowledge and skills were present in the I DEAL groups. Participants reported that the things they had learnt from I DEAL supported them in their daily lives. It was also found that the majority of the children reported that they reached their personal goals after the intervention period. We found effects that the modules Emotions, Peer Relations and Relationships with Adults are positively contributing to specific personal goals of children.

The impact mapping exercises showed the most significant lessons learnt and changes of the participants during the intervention process. Overall, we can conclude that especially the close social relationships of children improved; i.e. their relationships with caregivers and peers. The impact maps also showed how positive effects were still visible three months after completion of I DEAL and they revealed unexpected benefits from the intervention. The effects on family and community level that were reported by children and parents are likely to be strongly influenced by parents' involvement in the parallel PARENTS DEAL groups. The fact that children with a personal goal on *family* level have the highest goal attainment scores supports this conclusion.

Results were also found that do not support the hypothesis. For the module Conflict & Peace, no strong relationship was found with the personal goal attainment of the participants. Furthermore, no relationship was found between personal goals set on a personal or school level and any specific I DEAL module. However, this does not necessarily mean that goals on a personal or school level are not reached, or that certain I DEAL modules are not relevant in personal goal attainment. On the contrary, children do reach these goals and report on how the knowledge and skills of I DEAL modules are relevant in their daily lives. The lack of statistical relations between the modules and personal goals could be due to the large variations between personal goals in these categories, a lack of variation in quiz scores, or to other factors that influence children's personal goals, for example the social dynamics in a group and general skills that children learn from I DEAL such as communication skills or self-confidence.





**War Child I DEAL facilitator:**

*"The use of the I DEAL toolkit made me more aware and focused on the needs and issues of individual children. Integrating the exercises throughout I DEAL helps me to constantly check the relevance of the sessions for the children. You see that children really enjoy the participatory way of evaluating; they feel empowered to give their opinion of I DEAL."*



---

## 6. DISCUSSION

This study describes the pilot of a unique participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tool that was specifically designed for children and can be carried out as an integrated part of the I DEAL intervention. The tool was developed after the need became clear for an instrument that meets the challenges of conducting research in developmental humanitarian contexts, is appropriate for War Child's target group of children and young people, and suits the creative, participatory approach of the I DEAL intervention.

It might be argued that, without solid pre-post measures, control group or cross-culturally validated instrument, the effects of an intervention are difficult to demonstrate. However, when evaluating a life skills intervention like I DEAL, where effects are not only influenced by the content of the intervention but also by peer interaction, quality of and interaction with facilitators, and a parallel intervention for parents, it is important to see evaluating not only as 'proving' effects but also as 'learning about effects'. By focusing on the process of the intervention and the personal experiences and outcomes of participants, rich information is gathered not only on the effects of I DEAL but also on the successful ingredients of the intervention in a specific context. Moreover, by integrating monitoring and evaluation into the intervention, children are empowered to participate meaningfully in research and to make the intervention as effective and relevant as possible for themselves.

The results found in this study indicate that the knowledge and skills offered in modules Emotions, Peer Relations and Relationships with Adults are contributing to children's personal intervention goals and their perceived effectiveness of I DEAL. No significant effects were found between the module Conflict & Peace and personal goal attainment, or between personal goals related to personal skills or school and any of the I DEAL modules. When interpreting the results of this research, including the results that were expected but not found, we should take into account the limitations of this study.

### 6.1 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *Level of difficulty of the quizzes*

The scores of the quizzes were overall very high. It is likely that the quiz questions were not difficult enough to well-represent the actual level of knowledge and skills. Moreover, the overall high scores of the Conflict & Peace module, and thus limited variation between groups, could explain the lack of significant relations between knowledge and skills in this theme and personal goal attainment.

- 
- > **Recommendation: to evaluate and revise the quiz questions** in order to reach a set of relevant quiz questions at an adequate level for each theme, which will increase the validity of the collected information.

#### *Social desirability*

The issue of socially desirable responses should not be excluded when interpreting the high quiz scores and the personal goal reflections. Although most facilitators reported that children were able to make their own choices in the quizzes, in some groups shyness was still seen as an obstacle. However, even if social desirability has played a role in all measures, it clearly did not eliminate all effects, as is demonstrated by the different effects between I DEAL modules and personal goal attainment that were found.

#### *Attribution*

In this study we researched how the I DEAL modules contributed to children's personal goals. A challenge in the analysis was that we measured the personal goals on an individual level and the skills and knowledge on a group level, which limits the extent to which we can draw conclusions on their inter-relation.

- > **Recommendation: to conduct all exercises on an individual level** instead of a group level. This will allow us to measure change on child level, which will lead to the improved attribution strength of the study. Individual measures can also minimize the risk of the social desirability of answers. However, measuring on an individual level will have considerable implications for the length of the exercises, involve more extensive data collection and might result in a less participatory and fun exercise for participants.
- > **Recommendation: to include pre-post measures of knowledge and skills:** integrate a pre-post test in each module to assess the progress of individual participants on a particular theme against a baseline knowledge level. This will allow us to draw stronger conclusions on increased knowledge and skills. Here, the balance between research and intervention should also be guarded.

---

## 6.2 NEXT STEPS: GLOBAL PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

- > **Global I DEAL research with children:** War Child aims to learn about the effectiveness of life skills intervention I DEAL. In order to draw more concrete conclusions about intervention effects globally, we will begin collecting data in all areas where the intervention is being implemented. The global research that we are planning to conduct in the coming years will help us to identify both general effects and more context-specific effects of I DEAL, which will strengthen the programme theory of the intervention and contribute to a global evidence base for the success of the I DEAL intervention.
- > **Global evaluation exercises:** in order to implement the M&E toolkit in different areas of Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Asia, and with both younger age groups (11-15) and adolescent groups (16-20), we will validate the M&E exercises in different contexts. For the quiz exercises, we will need to consider the differences in basic knowledge and skills between target groups from different contexts and between different age groups, but also gender neutrality in quiz questions and answers, and culturally valid and appropriate concepts.
- > **Including PARENTS DEAL groups in research:** the impact mapping exercises that were conducted with the I DEAL participants and their parents/caregivers in Uganda showed how parents' involvement in a similar DEAL intervention positively contributed to the sustainability of intervention effects and lead to unexpected effects in the community. Therefore future research should have a wider scope that looks at the comprehensive approach that War Child takes when working with children and parents in parallel interventions, in order to determine intervention effectiveness.







