

Overview of Presentation Africa preparation meeting Theme 1a: Forms and underlying causes of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents: Social Norms: gender, sexuality, violence, HIV/AIDS, traditional practices.

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Title of Presentation: Linkages between HIV/AIDS and the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Africa

Background to the presentation

In July 2007, ECPAT International carried out a research in six countries in Africa (Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya, Uganda, Togo and Zambia) on the linkages between HIV/AIDS and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The research findings identify socio-cultural constructs and practices that make children vulnerable to CSEC and/or HIV/AIDS. The research reveals that among other factors, the very early sexual initiation of children demands preventative programmes targeting these groups of children, schools and communities.

The presentation will discuss objectives of the Research, which includes

- Assessment of information on the growth of HIV/AIDS pandemic and documentation of the linkage between CSEC and HIV/AIDS in Africa;
- Explore possible CSEC and HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation programmes that would be appropriate for the African context;
- Identify available HIV/AIDS support services and map out strategies on how victims of CSEC living with HIV/AIDS can increasingly access services;
- Learn models of good practices from each other/countries in Africa.

Interrelated factors that place children at risk of HIV infection and/or involvement in CSEC

The presentation will highlight the following as some of the factors that place children at risk of AIDS and CSEC:

- Stigmatization and discrimination against HIV/AIDS victims;
- Myths establishing dangerous links between children and HIV/AIDS;
- Traditional practices
 - i). Forced or early marriage, which often leads to child brides become divorced, abandoned or run away – without support;
 - i). Child domestic labour;
 - ii). Children engaged in petty selling and street begging;
 - iii). Unmarried girls compelled to support their families;
 - iv). Specific practices mentioned in Togo: female circumcision, sororate, convent voodoo, kidnapping, scarification.

Good practices from the research

The presentation will underscore the following as some of the good practices in breaking the cycle of HIV/AIDS and CSEC in the region:

- Cash transfer scheme introduced by the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ);

- Successful advocacy and lobbying by some EI groups in the region;
- Centres for people living with HIV/AIDS offer assistance to HIV positive parents and their children in the family (Togo and Ethiopia);
- Awareness raising.

Some negative Social constructs

The presentation will draw attention to the following negative social constructs as among those that impact on HIV/AIDS and CSEC as identified by the research:

- Gender disparity;
- Domestic violence against women and girls is culturally acceptable;
- Myths that facilitate sexual abuse and exploitation of children;
- Power dynamics;
- Gender constructs that socialise sexual violence against women and girls;
- The false belief that schools are safe places for children and that children cannot be sexually exploited in school environments;
- Sex with children perceived as safe so encouraged.

Recommendations

The presentation will highlight the following as some of the recommendations from the research:

- Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS education needs to be broadened to include CSEC protection messages;
- Prevention, protection and treatment need to reach children living in difficult circumstances;
- Services need to be child right-focused and child friendly;
- Significant targeting of demand/exploiters;
- Specialised services for children that need to include medical, psychosocial care, legal aid rehabilitation and reintegration;
- More relevant, targeted and realistic vocational training and livelihood options;
- The first two-year orphan hood is critical for interventions to prevent the affected child falling into CSEC;
- Early age of children entering CSEC suggests the need for prevention work at primary school;
- Likelihood of early sexual abuse in the community should be prevented through community outreach and sensitisation