



III WORLD CONGRESS AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
25-28 November 2008

UNICEF The Gambia - Good Practice: Preventing and Combating Sexual Exploitation of Children in Tourism

The issue: The Gambia, is a major tourism destination for tourists coming mainly from United Kingdom and Northern Europe. With the collapse of groundnut farming, Tourism has become a major foreign exchange earner for The Gambia, contributing approximately 8 percent of GDP and providing seasonal employment for about 10,000 people. Whilst Tourism in the Gambia has been a source of employment and foreign exchange, the unintended consequences of success in one sector, coupled with exacerbated poverty, has made Gambia a potential haven for sex tourists- who find it easier sexually exploit children. The 2004 UNICEF study on sexual abuse and exploitation of children concluded that children are being sexually exploited by Tourists. The study also concluded that aside from Tourists; children are being abused and exploited by adult Gambian males, a phenomenon that is euphemistically called **Sugar Daddy** syndrome. This is the sexual abuse and exploitation of girls by adult Gambian men in exchange for money and or gifts.



Another study by Child Protection Alliance-CPA (a Local UNICEF Partner NGO) and Terre des Hommes entitled "Smiling Coast...Study into Child Sex tourism in the Gambia and the involvement of Dutch Tourists" also confirmed that children are being sexually exploited by Tourists and Dutch tourists, the second highest set of visitors, are indeed involved in the sexual exploitation of children in The Gambia.

Factors contributing to the vulnerability of children to sexual abuse and exploitation are poverty, inadequate and non-implementation of laws, lack of life skills and livelihood skills for young people, the culture of silence, non registration of births and the sexual predatory nature of some adults in society. *"As a poor country that is also a tourist attraction, The Gambia is a vulnerable target for not a few unscrupulous visitors such as suspected or convicted paedophiles who enter the country in search of a low profile location to commit their crimes against children silently and with impunity."* (UNICEF, Situation Analysis of Women and Children, 2001)

Action: In 2001 UNICEF launched a study into the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in The Gambia. The study was completed in 2002, published and subsequently launched in 2003. This study combined with the Smiling Coast study by CPA and Terre des Hommes, provided the evidence which UNICEF used to do its high-level advocacy with senior government officials including the Minister of Tourism and the Gambia Tourism Authority (GTA). The launching of the Report was followed by the elaboration and finalization of a National Plan of Action to combat sexual abuse and exploitation of children in 2004.

Consequent to the study and the UNICEF advocacy, a Ministry of Tourism and the GTA set-up a CST Task force address the issue of Child sex Tourism in Gambian Tourism. The taskforce included UNICEF, GTA, CPA, Tour Operators, and government departments, Executives of Major Hotels in the Gambia, Gambia Hotel Association and the Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism (ASSET). The work of the taskforce led to the development of a CST Code of Conduct, which was developed into a brochure and 60,000 copies were printed with UNICEF support for distribution to Tourists on arrival. Development and printing 1000 copies of a Poster against sexual exploitation of children by Tourist was supported by UNICEF, for distribution at major hotels, resorts, restaurants and motels. UNICEF also supported the printing of 1000 copies of the CST Code of Conduct which were issued to all hotels who signed onto the CST Code of Conduct.

UNICEF also provided beach buggies and pedal bicycles for members of the Tourism Security Unit for use in patrolling the beaches and hotel areas of the Senegambia Tourism Area, where the major hotels are, to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation of children by tourists and to prevent unaccompanied children from getting access to hotels.

Working with CPA, its NGO partner, UNICEF supported several trainings and sensitization of hotel workers, tourist taxi drivers, hotel owners, tour operators and tourist guides on issues relating to sexual exploitation of children in tourism and the role they can play in combating it. Because of the high level advocacy by UNICEF and its partners, in 2003, the government passed the Tourism Offences Act to address child sex tourism in the Gambia. In 2004, the government went further to adopt policy called responsible Tourism Policy aimed at eliminating child sex tourism in The Gambia.

Cognizant of the fact that children are not only sexually abused and exploited by Tourists, but that sexual abuse of children also goes on in our schools and communities, UNICEF working with the Ministry of Education in 2005 supported the development and printing of the "Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual Abuse in Gambian Schools" and the training of hundreds of teachers on the Guideline. UNICEF also supported the sensitization of religious and community leaders on the sexual abuse of children which take place in communities.

In 2007 UNICEF supported the setting-up and training of seven Community Child Protection committees (CCPC). The CCPCs are to take child protection to the community and family level and for community members to be frontline child protectors and to confront and combat some harmful traditional practices which encourage sexual abuse of children such as early marriage. In 2004 UNICEF supported the decentralization birth registration services which succeed in increasing birth registration rates from 32 percent to 55 percent for children under-five years. In 2005 UNICEF supported the drafting and the eventual passing of the Children's Act which harmonises domestic laws with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The act stipulates stiff sentences for sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

Impact: Greater political commitment to the fight against sexual exploitation of children in tourism as evidenced by the recognition of the problem by government, the enactment of legislation and Responsible Tourism Policy and the two recent court cases involving Dutch and Norwegian citizens accused of sexually exploiting children. There is greater vigilance by workers at all the major hotels which have resulted in changes in the profile of the child sex tourist in the Gambia. However, instead of staying in the big hotels, the child sex tourist now stays in small motels or in rented accommodation in private houses, posing new and different challenges in the fight against child sex tourism in The Gambia. The legislation is now stricter in terms of penalties for the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. There is greater awareness of child sex tourism issues and child sexual abuse issues among hotel workers, religious and community leaders as well as teachers and officials of ministry of education. There is Gender Education Unit and a Guidance and Counselling Unit set-up in the ministry of education to deal with cases of sexual abuse of children in schools. The Ministry of education has now adopted a zero tolerance for sexual abuse of children by teachers.

Lessons Learnt and the Way Forward: One of the most important lessons learnt is the importance of monitoring the implementation of the Code of Conduct - to assess and determine the level of compliance with the Code by Operators in the Tourism Industry. This is one area which has been lagging and needs improvement. The other lesson learnt is that the profile of the Child Sex Tourist has changed. Instead of staying in big hotels, they now stay in small motels and in rented accommodation in private compounds. This raises the importance of working with local communities in the tourism area, to raise awareness of child sex tourism issues and to set-up and train neighbourhood watches in these areas. The other lesson learnt is that passing of legislation could be the easy part but making sure that people know the existence of the legislation and ensuring that the Police have the necessary skills, resources and the right attitude to be able to enforce the law could be difficult, especially in poor countries with a limited resource base, like The Gambia.

For more information: UNICEF Gambia Office:

Mr. Jeggan Grey Johnson, Communication Officer, jgreyjohnson@unicef.org or Mr. Salifu Jarsey, Child Protection Specialist, sjarsey@unicef.org