



III WORLD CONGRESS AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
25-28 November 2008

UNICEF Democratic Republic of the Congo - Good Practice:

Fighting the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents in Mines and Quarries In Katanga, Kasai Occidental and Kasai Oriental, DRC

The issue: Following the end of the conflict between government forces and various rebel groups in the DRC, and further to the election of President Joseph Kabila in 2006, activities of extractive industries have increased significantly in the provinces of Katanga, Kasai Oriental and Kasai Occidental. Since 2005, not only have many international mining companies established “comptoirs” in the region, but the number of unofficial quarries informally exploited by individuals has also skyrocketed. While the boom of the mining sector has become a source of income for many, it has also brought serious social concerns, notably in terms of child labour and sexual exploitation of children in an environment in which violence against children and adolescents was already alarming. Thus, in Kasai Occidental, in the city of Kananga alone, 268 cases of sexual violence against women were reported from 2006 and 2007, among which 62% of the survivors were children or adolescents.



While boys are most likely to be physically exploited while working in mines and quarries, it is estimated that 80% of the girls working or living in a mining environment are at a very high risk of being sexually exploited, notably due to their higher physical, social and economic vulnerability. While some victims are as young as 9 years old, most girls are aged from 13 to 17 years old. In 2008, a study commissioned by UNICEF on the sexual exploitation of children around mining sites and quarries showed that four main types of sexual exploitation [often referred to as “prostitution” by communities] could be found in those contexts: prostitution on a regular basis, occasional prostitution, companionship or temporary unions and forced prostitution.

However, each situation represents a clear violation of the rights of the children and should be denounced and condemned as such. Unfortunately, although penal sanctions are provided for those crimes in Congolese law, legislation is rarely enforced.

Action: UNICEF and its partners have been working for years to support the reinsertion of exploited children with their families notably through back to school programmes, vocational training, but also through economic and social support to their families and the development of income generating activities. Local authorities and communities have also been sensitized on the issue to help prevent the exploitation of children.

Since 2006, UNICEF has supported an institution, **IMCK** (Institut Medical Chrétien du Kasai) that provides assistance to sexually exploited women and children in mining areas in the region of Kananga. Founded in 1954, the institution was firstly in charge of providing medical assistance to victims, before expanding its interventions and offer comprehensive assistance to victims, as well as counselling and sensitization activities to communities. Within the framework of its cooperation with UNICEF, IMCK has adopted a four-fold strategy to prevent and respond to the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in mining areas which includes: i) medical and psychosocial assistance to victims to foster their reinsertion into their communities; ii) referral of HIV-positive survivors to specific medical

institutions, iii) strengthening community networks in order to help prevent sexual violence notably through vigilance committees and iv) advocacy towards traditional and religious leaders, as well as political and administrative authorities. The strategy also fosters the development of strategic partnerships with a variety of key international and national organizations and government structures to ensure that victims are offered a truly holistic assistance (medical, psychosocial, legal, economic etc.).

UNICEF DRC has been working with local authorities and NGO partners to prevent and respond to the issue of children working in mines and quarries in the provinces of Katanga, Kasai Occidental and Kasai Oriental. Partnerships with organizations focusing on the protection of children working in mining areas and on addressing sexual violence have been built for greater synergies and complementarities. Strong emphasis has also been put on the social and economic determinants of child abuse and sexual exploitation in order to provide a realistic alternative for children and their families to working in unofficial mines and quarries. Finally, strong advocacy activities have been led towards local and provincial authorities including local police to put the issue of child sexual exploitation in mining areas on the agenda and explore strategies to prevent and combat this phenomenon.

Impact: Since 2006, with UNICEF technical and financial support, more than 3,000 children have left hazardous working conditions, abuse and exploitation and have been reinserted with their families in Katanga, Kasai Occidental and Kasai Oriental. More than 5,000 other children in those families have also indirectly benefited from better life conditions. More than 1,450 sexually exploited children have either been reinserted with their families or have left the abusive environment in which they lived. Much progress has also been achieved with provincial and local authorities who have committed to fighting child sexual exploitation. For example, field visits have been organized with local police in some of the sites in which child exploitation was particularly alarming. Within the different communities, progress has also been noted in terms of recognizing as child sexual exploitation what was formerly tolerated as “child prostitution”, as well as in trying to prevent the stigmatization of victims.

Lessons Learnt and the Way Forward: Key lessons learnt through this initiative are the following: Fighting and preventing child sexual exploitation in mining areas requires a multisectoral approach that needs to address simultaneously child sexual exploitation and child labour in mines and quarries, while taking into consideration determining socio-economic factors. Therefore, strategic partnerships and systematic coordination among organizations with complementary child protection and socio economic reinsertion activities are critical. Of particular importance is also the constant liaison and collaboration with religious and traditional leaders, local authorities and communities to prevent and combat child sexual exploitation. Finally, there is a need to better document and analyze child sexual exploitation in mining environments to inform evidence-based advocacy at the national level, as with the exception of UNICEF’s study, little data on the issue is available.

For more information: UNICEF DRC Kinshasa, Chief, Child Protection: Alessandra Dentice: adentice@unicef.org – Emergency and Post-Conflict Specialist: **Tasha Gill:** tgill@unicef.org
UNICEF DRC Southern zone, Lubumbashi Child Protection Specialist: Ramatou Toure: rtoure@unicef.org