



# III WORLD CONGRESS AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
25-28 November 2008

## UNICEF Democratic Republic of Congo - Good Practice:

### Addressing sexual exploitation of girls in Bukavu and surroundings, Province of Sud Kivu/DRC.

**The issue:** Sexual exploitation in the Eastern part of DRC is an issue that has taken great prominence since the 90s, as it has been greatly exacerbated by the continued armed conflict, the weaknesses of the Congolese judicial system, generalized poverty and the disintegration of community and family safety nets. Due to pervasive insecurity and massive violations of human rights, South Kivu has witnessed massive displacement of population from rural areas towards urban centers.

This has created a situation of dire need characterised by a high number of vulnerable households where the only option for survival is, often in times, to enrol young girl between 10 and 17 years old into organised networks of commercial sexual exploitation in order to gain money to address basic need such as: shelter, food and access to health services. These networks are usually organised by old men and women (called in French *souteneurs*) who manage houses (called in French: *Colleges*) where the girls are obliged to have sex – mostly unprotected - with 8 to 10 clients a day and to take part in pornographic videos.



This is all done in collaboration with Government institutions, as they are usually given a share of the profits made by each girl. Clients of the *Colleges* are usually to be encountered amongst civilians, militaries and humanitarian workers.

**Action:** a set of preventive measures has been put in place by Child Protection agencies in order to address the worrying phenomenon of sexual exploitation of girls in Bukavu. At the explicit request of Government tough penal sentences are given to all adults implicated in any kind of sexual encounters with young girls (this has been corroborated by the new Child Protection Code, which has been approved by Parliament in July 2008 and is waiting for endorsement from the Presidency and by the Law on Sexual Violence dated 2006e, as is the implementation of packages of protection, care and support for girls who have been involved in sexual exploitation: this includes vocational training, psychosocial support and family mediation procedures for a sustainable family and community reintegration, reimbursable loans and professional kits. On-going work is done with the *Police Speciale de Protection* of Bukavu so that patrols are regularly undertaken in town both at night and during the day, so to create a more secure environment for young girls.

**Impact:** Thanks to work done by UNICEF and its civil society and Government counterparts the following results have been reached since 2004:

- 1) In 2004, a decree signed by the Mayor of Bukavu prohibited access of young girls into bars and projections of pornographic movies in town and its surroundings;
- 2) In 2006, the two most notorious *souteneurs* have been arrested and condemned;
- 3) In 2008, 304 girls have been reintegrated; 429 girls have been enrolled in vocational training; 7,337 community leaders have been sensitised with appropriate messages against sexual abuse and exploitation of minors; 776 girls have received psychosocial support.

**Partner:** Fondation Solidarité des Hommes (FSH) is Congolese NGO operational in the East of the DRC since 1990. Its main goal is to fight against the sexual exploitation of girls mainly in Southern Kivu.

**UNICEF:** UNICEF main goal in this specific area of intervention is to strengthen the overall protective environment for young girls through targeted interventions such as: the support to child protection mechanisms at community level and the support to girls who are victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, especially to ensure their family and community reintegration. UNICEF main interest is to support local child protection networks and Government social service authorities at decentralised level.

**Lessons Learnt and the Way Forward:** Key lessons learnt through this initiative are the following: It is more difficult to reintegrate girls who have given birth to children as a result of the exploitation. Stigmatisation is very difficult to overcome in communities and families of origin, even when mediation procedures are put in place. There is need to work more in prevention, rather than simply in protecting victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. The courts ability and willingness to deal with evidence in SV crimes is weak, inefficient and often delays judicial proceeding extensively or leads to acquittal. These limitations are related to the lack of medical and psychological expertise, the weak referral system for victims and the complete absence of forensic equipment for police investigations as well as the small number of witnesses willing to testify before the courts.. There's need to support capacity building efforts of judicial and legal structures, CSOs and Child Protection agencies so that the response to sexual exploitation could be multi-sectoral and integrated.

**For more information:**

**UNICEF DRC Kinshasa**, Chief, Child Protection: **Alessandra Dentice:** [adentice@unicef.org](mailto:adentice@unicef.org) – Emergency and Post-Conflict Specialist: **Tasha Gill:** [tgill@unicef.org](mailto:tgill@unicef.org)

**UNICEF DRC Eastern zone, Goma** Child Protection Specialist: **Pernille Ironside:** [pironside@unicef.org](mailto:pironside@unicef.org)