



III WORLD CONGRESS AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
25-28 November 2008

UNICEF TOGO - Good Practice

Fighting Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents in Togo

The Issue

In the early 1990's, Togo experienced a political and economic crisis that has since progressively impoverished the Togolese population. This multi-sectorial crisis was coupled with an interruption in the flow of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) from all international donors. The crisis created a major drop in all social indicators. Almost 7 out of 10 Togolese (69%), live below the poverty line, which means on less than \$2 a day. Almost half of the Togolese population is under the age of 18 (2,839 million children). Children are the main victims of this economical and political crisis.

In this challenging environment, sex work has become a source of income and survival for girls and women in Togo, some through "formal" sex work in brothels but more often as occasional or "informal" sex work. Research provided by PSI (Program Services International) in *Kassegne et Ahlegnan, 2003*, shows that the percentage of young girls engaged in sex work in Togo increased from 13% in 1999 to 32% in 2003; some of them begin as early as 10 years old. These girls often report that they engage in sex work as a means of survival. Many of them lack family support and are obliged to contribute to the family income at an early stage. Some have fled their homes as a consequence of bad treatment and violence. Others have been sold to pimps or other middlemen who subject them to maltreatment and physical and sexual exploitation.



In April 2004, the Little Sister project (PSAS, by its French abbreviation) was initiated to address the needs of these young vulnerable girls. With support from UNICEF TOGO and other partners, PSA has developed and executed a holistic program employing health, education and advocacy interventions to improve the health and well being of highly vulnerable girls aged 10 to 24.

Actions

1. PARTNERS

In the framework of the implementation of the PSAS project, PSI and the network of journalists active in the fight for the Rights of the Child in Togo, (Réseau des Journalistes pour la Défense des Droits de L'Enfant, or "RJDE") organized a reflections workshop on protection and promotion of the rights of the child and young vulnerable girls. The workshop took place in December 2007.

The workshop allowed for the exchange of information between 44 journalists from both private and public media outlets from various localities in Togo. The reflections workshop had three main objectives:

- Involve journalists in the promotion and protection of the rights of children and the rights of vulnerable girls;
- The fight against stigmas associated with exploitations and abuses of vulnerable girls;
- Promotion and collaboration between media bodies and the institutions defending the rights of the child and young girls.

The workshop provided an opportunity for the media to understand the various aspects of violations against children's rights, in particular cases of violence, exploitations and sexual abuses against minors, and to be cognizant of the risks and implications related to the use of information related to the abuses and exploitations of the victims. The group work sessions allowed for the journalists to expand their understanding of the role they can play as communicators and information providers on child abuse in Togo. Their role can include the following aspects: information sharing on Togolese legislature related to the rights of the child, sensitize and protect children from abuses and violations of their rights meanwhile ensuring confidentiality, promote communities to become involved in the fight against child abuse and more involved in the rights of their children, and intensify their understanding of VAES (violence, abuses, sexual exploitation), and the role of traditional practices that can be harmful to children. Such messages would be translated and diffused in local dialects.

2. UNICEF

The PSAS Project implementation is coordinated with several national and international partners, including Plan Togo, Care Togo, Terre des Enfants, the Ministry of Security, the Ministry of Youth Promotion, and others who regularly advise and facilitate PSAS advocacy activities. A PSAS partner since 2006, UNICEF TOGO has provided essential support to the PSAS literacy project and has actively participated in advocacy efforts through its membership in the PSAS advocacy committee.

In addition to this, UNICEF contributed to the adoption of the Children's Code by the Parliament in June 2007, as part of a partnership with the Togolese government (In the past few years, Togo has ratified several international conventions on child protection, including the

Convention on Children's Rights --- ratified by Togo in 1990 --- and several International Labor Organization conventions: No. 190 and 138).

In the same year, 11, 683 special court rulings allowed that number of children to be provided with a birth certificate and legal identity; 280 registry agents have been trained on birth registration. 108 people (members of the security forces and magistrates) have been trained as specialists on human trafficking, particularly of women and children. 170 social workers and other institutional workers and 117 teachers have been trained on child rights.

635 children (453 girls and 182 boys) victims of rights violations, such as a lack of parental care, child trafficking, severe forms of child labor, violence and sexual abuses as well as other forms of mistreatment, received assistance. 178 specialized commissions have been created at the community level for the follow-up and monitoring the respect of child rights.

During the floods in 2007, 6,200 children benefited from essential materials (blankets, mats, tarpaulins, clothes), medical supplies (anti-malaria and anti-cholera kits), water and sanitation supplies (drinking water containers, etc), and 300 children living in an IDP (Internally Displaced People) camp were provided for (food, drinking water, medical treatment, tents, etc).

This year, government support for the implementation of a protective environment for children was mainly related to development of protection policy and advocacy initiatives at the decision making level with the ultimate goal of greater inclusion of children in the promotion and defense of their rights.

On November 20th, 2008, in collaboration with UNICEF and various partners in development, the Togolese government will officially launch the «Child Helpline». The hotline will not only serve to assist those who face abuse and exploitation, but also for those who want to report cases of abuse.

Impact

Topics of sex work and vulnerability of girls and young women are rarely discussed in the media or amongst Togolese people. The national cross-generational sex campaign raised awareness and stimulated interest regarding this important issue. Regular radio and TV show appearances by the Little Sister staff have also brought the topics of child protection and sex work by minors to the general public.

As a result of the involvement of the media in the PSAS awareness raising campaign, on several occasions the RJDE became aware of violence and abuse cases against children in the interior of the country before involvement by the authorities. This confirmed the beginning of transparent collaboration between social services and the media for the joint effort of child protection and promotion of children's rights against all aspects of VAES. Another example of this collaboration is the closing of a restaurant resulting from the mass mobilization of the media on judicial decisions related to child rights violations (child trafficking, sexual abuse etc.).

Lessons Learnt and the Way Forward

The positive impact of the media cannot be underestimated for the sensitization and education of the people for behavior change related to the protection of the rights of the child against VAES. The reflections workshop was a clear example of how journalists can be involved in future collaborations with the PSAS project. Meanwhile it is critical to improve the capacity of the Togolese media to better understand the instruments for child protection as well as the instruments for correct use of information. Equally important will be the capacity building of the journalists in communication techniques, considering the majority have not received official training in journalism, and to encourage journalists in the field to facilitate investigations related to abuse cases whenever possible.

To ensure the partnership between the media and other development bodies is effective, financial support is required so that the recommendations arrived at during the reflections workshop are translated and activated in the short to medium term.

The creation of an enabling institutional and organizational environment would also be a key factor to give to this practice a sustainable impact.

For more information contact the UNICEF TOGO Country Office:

Félicité MUKANTAMBARA, Child Protection Specialist, fmukantambara@unicef.org

Essi Fafa SOULE, Communication Officer, fsoule@unicef.org