

# CHILD PROTECTION

## Relevant Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

for child protection are 1, 3 and 6. The likelihood of attaining goals at the current rate is:

MDG #1: Eradicating extreme poverty – unlikely; and hunger – likely.

MDG #3: Promoting gender equality and empower women – likely.

MDG #6: Combatting HIV and AIDS - likely, malaria and other diseases – unlikely.

## OVERVIEW

UNICEF's Child Protection Programme contributes to the creation of a protective environment for children against violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. Significant progress has been made, but the realisation of children's rights to psychological, social and economic wellbeing remains a long way from being achieved in Liberia.

## Accomplishments

- Resettlement of 12,000 children formerly associated with fighting forces.
- Strengthened legal and policy framework through development of a National Social Welfare Policy and the Children's Act.
- Support to reintegration of 9,269 demobilized children through formal education, vocational skills training and apprenticeships.
- Establishment of community-based structures (child welfare committees, children and youth clubs) to provide monitoring and protection to vulnerable children nationwide. This work is underpinned by a vibrant child protection network consisting of over 40 NGOs.
- Established mechanism to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) through establishment of a Women and Children Protection Section in the Liberia National Police – with associated training of magistrates, social workers and police officers.
- Ensured child participation in national reconciliation efforts through involvement of children in hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

## Challenges

The post-war situation in Liberia is characterized by weak legal and social protection systems - significantly increasing the risks and incidence of child rights violations.

The current justice system does not adequately address the needs of children who come in contact with the law. Many children end up in the formal justice system even for minor offences. Ensuring justice for children suffers from extremely weak capacity from key duty bearers; judges, magistrates, prosecutors and state attorneys. Some laws that relate to children are not in accordance with international treaties and conventions and do not provide adequate legal protection for children. Only 4% of children under five are registered with a birth certificate.

Poverty has greatly affected parenting and child-care practices. At the family and community level many children lack sufficient guidance to enable them to develop their full potential. 7% of children are orphans and only 47% of all children currently live with both parents. The 2007 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) conducted in 2007 found that 94% of children aged two to 14 are subjected to some form of psychological or physical punishment – and one out of five is involved in child labour.

Many parents have resorted to offering children for adoption and relying on institutional care, undermining family preservation values. Up to 6,000 children are now estimated to be living in child-care establishments that do not meet minimal standards of care. The situation of girls is even more precarious with up to 39% (aged 15–19) having experienced violence. Teenage pregnancy is common (31%) and the prevalence of child marriage is extremely high at 49%.

Liberia's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare is leading the development and implementation of a Social Welfare Policy with decentralized birth registration and application of standards for children in institutional care.

## FOCUS AREAS 2008-2012

The Child Protection Programme will contribute to the creation of a protective environment for children against violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect.

- Develop comprehensive child justice system and diversion programme to ensure legal, quality care and protection for children in contact with the law.
- Revitalising a functioning birth registration system throughout the country.
- Supporting community-based social and economic reintegration for the most vulnerable children.
- Instituting mechanisms for monitoring and prevention of child trafficking and the worst forms of child labour.
- Providing a framework for enhanced child protection through support to implementation of a social welfare policy and development and implementation of a Children's Act which will include adoption, social welfare policy and strategy framework and a national plan of action for all vulnerable children.

## UNICEF works in partnership with:

ILO, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNIFEM, UNMIL, UNOPS, WB, WFP, WHO, international and national NGOs.