

UNICEF HUMANITARIAN ACTION REPORT 2009

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

BEYOND THE DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED GROUPS

Côte d'Ivoire is working towards restoring law and order following a crisis that crippled the country's economic and social structure. New life prevails and thousands of children who have gone back to schools are benefiting from basic social services and commodities, and many of their parents are earning a living again. Post-conflict and transition drives were pulled together by the cohort of international humanitarian agencies working in the country.

On the bright side of Côte d'Ivoire's political turnover is the story of a child formerly associated with armed groups in 2002 who has forgotten his anger and eagerness to seek revenge for the death of his parents. He has benefited from the UNICEF-supported demobilization and reintegration programme for children associated with armed groups.

"At the end of the war, I said I wanted to raise chicken, and I and a group of other children were taught how to look after them, vaccinate them, feed them and also how to build a place where they would lay their eggs. Today I am 19. I have a job and, even if I left my village, I could raise chicken elsewhere!"

Constant, who is also benefiting from the UNICEF programme for children formerly associated with armed groups, adds, "Today I am 18 and I know how to earn money. I'm feeling ok inside my head now and I know that if I can remain hopeful I will make it."

UNICEF's basic education programme offers to children above legal school age and to children out of the formal education system the opportunity to enrol in a basic education programme. Schoolteachers from the communities of Korhogo, San-Pedro and Bondoukou were trained in basic teaching skills. The rehabilitation of 10 community schools in Bondoukou will enable more than 2,000 children to benefit from this programme.

Thanks to joint national and international efforts, which create opportunities for older children such as these, the parties in conflict have managed to turn the tide of violence, although not completely.

Despite the success of the UNICEF-supported demobilization and reintegration programme for children associated with armed groups, major protection issues still undermine the lives of children in Côte d'Ivoire, namely the rape of children. Security is most critical in regions where local authorities have no time for police investigations. Survivors of sexual violence are afraid of taking their cases to the justice or the police. They also fear stigma, social discrimination and reprisal.

K.A.N is 17 years old. She was raped by two men armed with knives as she was going home from school. She screamed but no one came to help. "They threw me inside a container with more than 35 girls. We were abused one after the other. At one stop, they took some girls away, I don't know where. Since it was taking so long, 15 of us decided to run away."

The number of sexually abused children continues to grow due to persistent pockets of instability in some parts of the country. UNICEF supported the establishment of committees against sexual and gender-based violence and female genital mutilation in 150 locations in West, Centre, North and North-West Provinces. This programme helped sensitize more than 30,000 people on sexual violence and female genital mutilation.

UNICEF caters to more than 7,000 children, of which 3,000 were formerly associated with armed groups, by providing psychosocial and medical support, food, as well as schooling and vocational training.