INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN’S RIGHTS DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL

New York 2009

The New School
November 4, 18, 19

Fordham University
November 11

City University of New York
November 13

International Screenings
Canada, Croatia, Fiji, Guinea, Hungary, India, Malawi, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Spain, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Zambia
Acknowledgements

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Special thanks to: John Biaggi, Director, Human Rights Watch International Film Festival; and Patricia Moccia, PhD, former chief of editorial, UNICEF Division of Communication.

Cover photo credits (clockwise from top right): Children of the Stars © Robin Aspey; 21 Up South Africa: Mandela’s Children (two images) © First Run Features; Trench Town: The Forgotten Land © James Ewart; Children of Leningradsky © Hanna Polak; The Devil’s Miner © Kief Davidson
On 20 November 2009, the world celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, the Convention outlines universal standards for the care, treatment and protection of the world’s 2.2 billion children aged 18 and younger. Over the past two decades, the Convention has had a tremendously positive impact on children’s lives. Yet too many are still denied their essential rights.

The International Children’s Rights Film Festival is a festival of documentary films, presented jointly by UNICEF and various partners to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Screenings will be held in several countries from November through December 2009. This unique collection of documentaries highlights where the world has succeeded or failed to ensure the fundamental rights of children.

Nine year-old Punam must work to help support her family (Punam, Nepal). Jacqueline, 18, and Nhom, 9, both suffer the devastating impact of war (Behind Closed Eyes, Rwanda and Cambodia). Toti ran away from home at age 11 to escape early marriage and genital cutting (Living Rights – Toti, Kenya). And countless children living in Moscow’s underground train stations are victims of prostitution, police abuse and addiction (Children of Leningradsky, Russian Federation).

These films also celebrate those children, young people and families who are determined to transform their lives and communities. Young women in Zambia who learn film-making as a way to take charge of their future (Where the Water Meets the Sky, Zambia). Yoshi, the Japanese boy with Asperger’s syndrome determined to be schooled with his peers (Living Rights – Yoshi, Japan). Adolescent boys in the United States of America who want to escape the poverty and violence in their Baltimore community (Boys of Baraka, United States).

UNICEF and its worldwide partners, country offices and National Committees, as well as the film-makers, universities and others who supported this project, are committed to making the principles of the Convention real for the world’s children. By presenting these films within the framework of the Convention, we hope to bring increased attention and greater urgency to the call for ensuring the human rights of all children.

The fight for the rights of children, for their protection and well-being, is of the utmost necessity. Whenever this fight is lost – as it is when a homeless child dies on the street – we must question how much is being done, by nations, legislators, communities and individuals, to protect children from the saddest fate of all.

— Hanna Polak, Documentary film-maker
### International Children’s Rights Documentary Film Festival

Films and screening dates vary by country

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*Their Lives, Their Voices, Their Rights*
New York Screenings

4 November
6:30 p.m.  The Devil’s Miner  
*Bolivia, 2004 • 82 minutes, Spanish with English subtitles*  
*Directors: Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani*

The New School, Wollman Hall  
65 West 11th Street, 5th floor (between 5th and 6th Avenue)  
RSVP: gpiaevents@newschool.edu

11 November
7:30 p.m.  Boys of Baraka  
*United States, Kenya, 2005 • 85 minutes, English with English subtitles*  
*Directors: Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady*

Fordham University, Keating Hall Auditorium  
441 East Fordham Road  
East Fordham Road and 3rd Ave, Bronx, NY  
RSVP: iped@fordham.edu

13 November
6:00 p.m.  A Kind of Childhood  
*Bangladesh, 2005 • 51 minutes, Bengali with English subtitles*  
*Directors: Catherine Masud and Tareque Masud*

The CUNY Graduate Center, Proshansky Auditorium  
365 Fifth Avenue (between 34th and 35th Street)  
RSVP: unhistory@gc.cuny.edu

18 November
6:30 p.m.  Children of Leningradsky  
*Russian Federation, 2004 • 35 minutes, Russian with English subtitles*  
*Director: Hanna Polak*

The New School, Wollman Hall  
65 West 11th Street, 5th floor (between 5th and 6th Avenue)  
RSVP: gpiaevents@newschool.edu

19 November
6:00 p.m.  Behind Closed Eyes: Dreams of a Kite  
*Cambodia, 2000 • 25 minutes, Khmer with English subtitles*  
*Director: Duco Tellegen*

The New School  
66 West 12th Street, Room 404 (between 5th and 6th Avenue)  
RSVP: gpiaevents@newschool.edu

For the New York events, thanks to:  
Monika Shankar, Event Coordinator  
Graduate Program in International Affairs  
New School University

Professor Henry M. Schwalbenberg,  
Director  
Graduate Program in International Political Economy and Development (IPED)  
Fordham University

Nancy Okada, Administrative Director  
Ralph Bunche Institute  
City University of New York
**21 Up South Africa: Mandela’s Children**  
*South Africa, 2007 • 69 minutes • English • Director: Angus Gibson*

Nearly a quarter of the workforce is unemployed in South Africa, despite the fact that unemployment rates have been reduced nationally since 2003. Joblessness particularly affects women, people under age 35 and black Africans.

Films in the *Up* series document visits with a group of children from different countries every seven years. In the 2007 film, *21 Up South Africa: Mandela’s Children*, film-maker Angus Gibson revisited 11 young people as they turn 21 in post-apartheid South Africa. The result is an insightful look at the lives of these young people, who face various economic and social realities – and must deal with such issues as unemployment, crime, race relations, education and the AIDS epidemic, which has killed three of the original 14 children.

**A Kind of Childhood**  
*Bangladesh, 2005 • 51 minutes • Bengali with English subtitles • Directors: Catherine Masud and Tareque Masud*

In Bangladesh, where about 36 per cent of the population lives on less than US$1.25 a day, 13 per cent of children are forced to work to support themselves or supplement their family income.

Over a six-year period, *A Kind of Childhood* follows the life of Idris, one of thousands of children who earn their living on the busy streets of Dhaka. Although he had to work from an early age to support his ailing father, he tries to hold onto his dream of an education, even while working long hours as an assistant on a public transportation vehicle. When circumstances force him to drop out of school, his desire for an education is replaced by new dreams of urban success. Eventually, the harsh realities of city life begin to close in on Idris, forcing him to reconsider his goals as he enters adulthood.

**Back Home Tomorrow**  
*Afghanistan, Sudan, 2008 • 90 minutes • Dhari, Nuba/Arab with English subtitles • Directors: Fabrizio Lazzaretti and Paolo Antolini*

Children living in conflict-affected countries are more likely to suffer from poverty, undernutrition, poor health and lack of education. Health facilities are often targeted during wars, and a focus on military needs means that sick or injured children may be denied proper medical care.

*Back Home Tomorrow* follows Yagoub and Murtaza, two boys who receive medical care from Emergency, the Italian aid organization. Emergency helps civilian casualties in war zones, about one third of whom are children. Yagoub, who fled with his family from Darfur and now lives in the Mayo Refugee Camp in Khartoum, needs a heart operation. But neither his family nor other members of his tribe can help pay for it. Murtaza lost his left hand in a landmine accident and is recuperating in hospital in Kabul. The directors deliver these two fascinating and heartfelt stories without commentary and combine them in a way that is both compelling and poignant.
Behind Closed Eyes is a series of four films that explore how children must strive to build a future after their lives have been gravely altered by violent conflict in their country. Each film documents a child’s journey from devastation to hope.

**Behind Closed Eyes: Dreams of a Kite**
Cambodia, 2000 • 25 minutes • Khmer with English subtitles • Director: Duco Tellegen

*Thousands of children all over the world are being killed, injured and orphaned by landmines and unexploded ordnance discarded or fired by combatants. In Cambodia, one of the worst-affected countries, children account for about half of all landmine casualties.*

*Dreams of a Kite* features 13-year-old Nhom, an orphan who has lost one leg. To build a future for himself, he must leave his younger brother and aunt to get an education in an orphanage in the city. Fitted with a new prosthetic leg, Nhom becomes friends with another young amputee but still feels shame about his handicap and struggles with being away from his family.

**Behind Closed Eyes: No Bush for a Bad Child**
Liberia, 2000 • 25 minutes • English • Director: Duco Tellegen

*Although the conflict in Liberia has ended, armed forces along the borders with Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire continue to recruit children into their ranks.*

*No Bush for a Bad Child* features Spencer, a former child soldier in Liberia, as he participates in a relief project that provides counselling and prepares children who have been used by armed forces and groups for reintegration into society. The film includes Spencer’s emotional reconciliation with his family and his community.

**Behind Closed Eyes: Sad Faces**
Kosovo, 2000 • 20 minutes • Albanian with English subtitles • Director: Duco Tellegen

*Kosovo has the highest infant mortality rate in Europe. Currently, less than 10 per cent of children 3–6 years old have access to early childhood education and development programmes. Nine years since peace was restored in Kosovo, the situation for children remains dire.*

*Sad Faces* features 7-year-old Eranda and her family, who fled the war in Kosovo. From a Macedonian camp they move to a shelter in the Netherlands. They are eventually reunited with their family in Kosovo.

**Behind Closed Eyes: Stand up and Speak**
Rwanda, 2000 • 25 minutes • Kinyarwanda with English subtitles • Director: Duco Tellegen

*Half of Rwanda’s citizens are under 18 years old. Most of these children live on less than US$1.25 a day. Many are still recovering from the 1994 genocide and its aftermath.*

*Stand Up and Speak* features Jacqueline, a young Rwandan girl who was raped and becomes a mother before her 18th birthday. The film documents her poignant struggle to love her child and herself.
**Boys of Baraka**  
*United States, Kenya, 2005 • 85 minutes • English with English subtitles • Directors: Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady*

Across the United States, 3 in 10 students do not graduate from high school. Poor and minority students are at highest risk of dropping out of school.

In an experimental programme to reduce the rate of juvenile delinquency, the city of Baltimore sent a group of 12-year-olds deemed ‘at risk’ to a boarding school in Kenya, affording the boys the rare opportunity to turn their troubled lives around. Focusing on four of the youths, *Boys of Baraka* follows the students as they struggle to overcome the obstacles of their past in their hopeful bid for a brighter future.

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**Bridge Over the Wadi**  
*Israel, 2006 • 55 minutes • Arabic, Hebrew with English subtitles • Directors: Barak Heymann and Tomer Heymann*

Across the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the lack of teaching facilities and overcrowded classrooms has a direct impact on children’s ability to learn: In 2008, 80 per cent of 16,000 sixth-graders in Gaza failed standardized tests in Arabic, English, math and science.

For the first time in Israel, a group of Arab and Jewish parents decide to establish a conjoint bi-national, bi-lingual school inside an Arab village. *Bridge Over the Wadi* follows the school’s first year and portraits, through the personal stories of its characters, a complex and fragile attempt to create an environment of coexistence against the backdrop of a complicated reality.

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**Children of Leningradsky**  
*Russian Federation, 2004 • 35 minutes • Russian with English subtitles • Director: Hanna Polak*

Despite efforts by the Russian Federation to reduce the number of homeless children, many young children (8–16 years old) are forced to leave home. Estimates for the number of children living on the streets vary from 20,000 to 100,000.

*Children of Leningradsky* delves into the underground world of the children living in the Moscow train station. At the time the film was made authorities estimated that about 30,000 children were living on the streets and railway stations of Moscow. Often driven to homelessness by abandonment, abuse or other intolerable conditions, their situation grows even more gruesome as they become victims of prostitution, police abuse, addiction and death. Utilizing vérité footage of more than a dozen children, the film documents the sobering reality of post-Soviet Russia. The children speak candidly about their lives, routines and lost dreams.
Children of the Stars
China, 2007 • 50 minutes • Chinese, English with English subtitles • Director: Robin Aspey

Children with disabilities are less likely than other children to be in school, and in some countries they have lower transition rates resulting in lower achievement.

*Children of the Stars* follows the Feng Jia Wei family, whose 5-year-old son is autistic, cannot speak and is often violent. The family frequently receives verbal abuse from people who do not understand their son's behaviour, and he was rejected by local schools. The careers of both parents have been destroyed because their son requires constant care and attention. Their last real chance lies in an 11-week course offered by a charity school in Beijing called ‘Stars and Rain’. Here, they hope to master new behavioural techniques that will enable them to teach and manage their son. If he can make enough progress, he may be accepted into a regular local school.

Cluster Toys / Deadly Playground
Lebanon, 2007 • 23 minutes • Arabic with English subtitles • Director: Katia Saleh

Landmines and unexploded ordnance violate nearly all the articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: a child’s right to life, to a safe environment in which to play, to health, clean water, sanitary conditions and adequate education.

*Deadly Playground* features 13-year-old Hussein, who lives with his family in the village of Sadikkeen in south Lebanon. They are one of many farming families that live and work in so-called ‘contaminated areas’ where there are believed to be large numbers of unexploded cluster bombs. Hussein, like hundreds of children from south Lebanon, has come across many cluster bomblets in his neighbourhood and farmland. He is fascinated by them — yet fully aware of their deadly power and the horrific injuries they can cause to unsuspecting victims.

Little Voices, Moving Stories
Colombia, 2003 • 20 minutes • Spanish with English subtitles • Director: Eduardo Carrillo, Lecturer, University of Andes, Colombia

The number of people internally displaced by the violence in Colombia is estimated to be 2.5 million to 3.5 million. Around half of them are children and adolescents.

*Little Voices, Moving Stories* uses drawings by children who are displaced and are victims of violence in Colombia. The children narrate their own stories as their powerful illustrations of violence and sadness fill the screen.
Living Rights is a documentary series on the rights of the child. Each film is an intimate portrait of a child living in a situation that conflicts with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Living Rights – Lena
Belarus, 2004 • 28 minutes • Russian with English subtitles • Director: Duco Tellegen

Belarus continues to suffer from the aftermath of the 1986 nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl. Approximately 13 per cent of the nation’s children live in areas still affected by the disaster. More than 4,000 children in the region are affected by thyroid cancer.

Eleven-year-old Lena lives with her foster mother Galah in a village near the nuclear reactor of Chernobyl. Lena, who is exhibiting health problems, has no contact with her biological mother. She is torn between Galah who loves her, and the Italian family that has offered to adopt her and could provide the medical care she needs.

Living Rights – Roy
Peru, 2004 • 29 minutes • Spanish with English subtitles • Director: Duco Tellegen

In Peru, traditional mining practices rely on passing knowledge from adults to children. Children with no access to education have little alternative but to enter the workforce.

In the Peruvian village of Mollehuaca, 10-year-old Roy works alongside his father and older brother searching for gold in the mines. His father has trouble with the notion that his son’s right to an education is more important than learning how to work the mines. At a community meeting, the miners strongly defend the need for their children to work.

Living Rights – Toti
Kenya, 2004 • 25 minutes • Masai with English subtitles • Director: Duco Tellegen

More than one third of young women 20–24 years old in developing countries have reported that they were married or in union by age 18. According to the most recent UNICEF data, 25 per cent of girls enter into child marriage each year in Kenya.

Toti is a 14-year-old Masai girl living in Kenya who ran away three years earlier when her mother told her that she would be married. The family urgently needed the cattle they would receive for the marriage, so Toti’s twin sister was married in her place. During the film, Toti tries to reconnect with her sister and family.
Living Rights — Yoshi  
Japan, 2004 • 30 minutes • Japanese with English subtitles • Director: Duco Tellegen

In Japan, exemptions for disabled children from school were common until 1979, when the Government extended compulsory education to all children regardless of abilities.

Sixteen-year-old Yoshi has Asperger’s syndrome – a form of autism that makes social interaction difficult and causes repetitive patterns of behaviour and interests. Yoshi’s dream is to attend a regular Japanese high school. Aware of his different abilities, Yoshi uses humour, wit and creativity.

Los Herederos  
Mexico, 2008 • 90 minutes • Spanish with English subtitles • Director: Eugenio Polgovsky

An estimated 3.6 million children 5–17 are working in Mexico. Use of child labour in agriculture is widespread, particularly during harvest season, and especially involving children from an Amerindian background. They commonly work 12–17 hours a day.

Los Herederos is a portrait of the young children in the Mexican countryside who begin to work at an early age. The film focuses on their daily struggle for survival and their activities in farming, sculpting and painting alebrijes, shepherding, making bricks, weaving, looking after their siblings, collecting water, harvesting tomatoes, chillies and maize, and labouring in myriad other activities. They have inherited tools and techniques from their ancestors, but they have also inherited their day-to-day hardships: As generations pass, child workers seem to remain captive in a cycle of inherited poverty.

Pray the Devil Back to Hell  
Liberia, 2008 • 72 minutes • English (Subtitles: Arabic, Czech, French, Hebrew, Korean, Spanish) • Director: Gini Reticker

Liberia’s brutal 14-year civil war, which ended in 2003, resulted in massive population displacement and a collapse of basic social services. More than one third of the population, and an even higher proportion of the country’s children, still live on less than US$1.25 a day. Although the security situation has improved greatly, sexual violence against women and children is pervasive.

Pray the Devil Back to Hell is the gripping account of a group of brave and visionary women who demanded peace for Liberia. The compelling story of the women’s historic yet unsung achievement is told through contemporary interviews, archival images and scenes of present-day Liberia. The film recounts the experiences and memories of the women who were instrumental in bringing lasting peace to their country.
Punam
Nepal, 2006 • 27 minutes • Napali, Tamang with English subtitles • Directors: Lucian Muntean and Natasa Stankovic

Child labour statistics reveal that 44 million children are in the workforce in South Asia. But these numbers do not tell the full story, because millions of girls who work are kept out of sight and not counted.

Nine-year-old Punam Tamang lives in Bhaktapur in Nepal. Since losing her mother at age five, Punam has been the family caretaker, providing for her younger brother Krishna (now seven) and her younger sister Rabina (now five). The Tamang children see little of their father because he works double shifts in a rice factory to earn enough money for their school fees. In Punam, the family’s struggles are seen along with those of neighbourhood families who do not make enough money to afford the school fee. Instead of studying, children in these families work with their parents at the local brick factories and stone quarries.

Redlight
Cambodia • 2009 • 71 minutes • Khmer with English subtitles • Directors: Guy Jacobson, Adi Ezroni and Charles Kiselyak

Cambodia is a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour. While the Cambodian Government is making significant efforts to combat trafficking, the sale of virgin girls continues to be problematic with Cambodian and foreign men paying high prices for sex with children.

Redlight focuses on the personal stories of former and current child sex slaves in Cambodia. The film combines undercover footage from operating brothels and harrowing testimonials of young girls and boys who were sold or abducted into child sex slavery. With the help of grass-roots activist Somaly Mam and politician Mu Sochua, two remarkable advocates for change in Cambodia, the film follows these touching stories for 5 years as the children try to restore normalcy to their lives and some seek justice by preparing to take various brothel owners to court.

Sari’s Mother
Iraq, 2006 • 21 minutes • Arabic with English subtitles • Director: James Longley

The war in Iraq has brought widespread insecurity, fractured once-peaceful communities, eroded social services and drained the country of skilled doctors and teachers. Children’s safety, education, health and psychosocial well-being are increasingly at risk.

Sari’s Mother is an intimate portrait of life inside war-torn Iraq. In the restive Mahmudiyah area of central Iraq, the Zegum family makes their living by selling milk and butter and farming land rented from their neighbours. Sari, their 10-year-old son, is dying of AIDS. Faten, the boy’s mother, does not lose her resolve as she visits doctors and ministers trying to get help from Iraq’s broken health-care system.
The Day My God Died
India, Nepal, 2004 • 62 minutes • English, Nepalese, Hindi with English subtitles • Director: Andrew Levine

The clandestine nature of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation makes it difficult to establish reliable numbers for child and adolescent victims. In addition to the trauma of sexual exploitation, survivors often miss out on school and are exposed to physical injury, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and unwanted pregnancies.

The Day My God Died presents the stories of young girls whose lives have been shattered by the child sex trade. In the film, they describe the day they were abducted from their village and sold into sexual servitude. Recruiters capture them, smugglers transport them, brothel owners enslave them, corrupt police betray them, and customers rape and infect them. Organizations working to help free these girls are sometimes successful, and some victims have formed their own underground railway out of slavery. Maili, trafficked at 19 along with her infant daughter, risks her life to help other girls. Jyoti, sold at age 12, leads a raid on a brothel — resulting in the rescue of seven girls and the arrest of two brothel owners.

The Devil’s Miner
Bolivia, 2004 • 82 minutes • Spanish with English subtitles • Directors: Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani

In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, although it is illegal, thousands of children work in the mining industry, starting as young as five or six. While most children working in the mines attend school, they perform below the grade level for their age.

The Devil’s Miner tells the story of 14-year-old Basilio Vargas and his 12-year-old brother, Bernardino, who work in the ancient Cerro Rico silver mines of Bolivia. Raised without a father and living in extreme poverty with their mother and 6-year-old sister on the slopes of the mine, the boys assume many adult responsibilities. It takes two months’ work just to afford the clothing and supplies they need for school. Without an education, the brothers have no chance to escape their destiny in the silver mines.

The Final Inch
India, 2008 • 90 minutes • English, Hindi, Urdu with English subtitles (also subtitled in: Arabic, Bengali, English, French, German, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Kannada, Korean, Marathi, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, and Simple Chinese) • Director: Irene Taylor Brodsky

Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan are the last four countries where polio remains prevalent. India’s high birth rate and dense population present the greatest challenge in the global drive to end the disease.

Nearly 50 years after a vaccine for polio was developed in the United States, the virus is largely forgotten in many countries. But it remains a threat to the world’s poorest. In India, The Final Inch follows volunteers as they try to persuade reluctant families that their children’s health transcends politics and religion. The film personalizes the global campaign to eradicate polio by capturing the dedication of volunteers as they search for the impoverished and vulnerable children who need the vaccine before it is too late.
**Trench Town: The Forgotten Land**

*Jamaica, 2007 • 58 minutes • English with English subtitles • Director: James Ewart*

Sixty per cent of children 9–17 years old in Jamaica have a family member who has been a victim of violence, and 37 per cent stated that a family member had been killed.

*Trench Town: The Forgotten Land* shows the stark realities of living in a community where violence is the norm and children live in a state of dread. Children speak about doing homework by flashlight under their beds, afraid of stray bullets. Their fear and pain are palpable as they express their hopes for a better future.

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**Walking the Path of Unity**

*Senegal, 2009 • 35 minutes • Diola with English or French subtitles • Directors: Marc Dacosse and Eric Dagostino*

In Senegal, and other countries, the movement to end female genital mutilation/cutting continues to gain momentum. Since 1997, 3,791 communities in Senegal, 364 in Guinea, and 23 in Burkina Faso, as well as villages from three other African countries, have publicly declared the abandonment of this practice.

In the heart of Senegal’s Casamance region, the people of Diégoune and neighbouring villages publicly declared the abandonment of the practice of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). Facilitated by Tostan and the Belgian non-governmental organization Respect, and shown in partnership with Cinéma Numérique Ambulant, *Walking the Path of Unity* highlights key players in the movement towards the abandonment of female genital cutting. Whether in the rice field, the central village space or the mosque, the men and women in the film explain with joy and pride their reasons for deciding to abandon practices harmful to the well-being of their children. Their dedication and activism eventually led to the collective abandonment of FGM/C and child/forced marriage by the village’s entire social network. The film aims to be a tool for accelerating the abandonment of female genital cutting in Senegal and is intended for use in the communities that are supported by the Tostan-UNICEF programme.
Where the Water Meets the Sky
Zambia, 2008 • 60 minutes • Bemba, English with English subtitles • Director: David Eberts.
Co-director, producer: Helen Cotton

More than 20 per cent of Zambian children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Households with widows and orphans often lack the resources to cultivate sufficient food.

In Samfya District, a remote region of northern Zambia, a group of women had the opportunity to make a film as a way to speak out about their lives. Through a film-making training programme for girls and young women created by the Campaign for Female Education (Camfed), they are guided by Abibata Mahama and Dominique Chadwick, experienced participatory film-makers. The documentary, Where the Water Meets the Sky, follows the women as they make their film, which recounts the real-life experiences of Penelope, an 18-year-old orphan struggling to provide for herself and her siblings after her parents’ deaths. In the process of making the film, the women of Samfya challenge age-old social injustices within their community and encourage serious change. What begins as a workshop about film-making and a quest to tell Penelope’s story becomes a journey in empowerment.

Documentaries provide evidence of exploitation and abuse that inspires us to increase our efforts to protect children from violence and neglect. While complete child protection requires governments to implement programmes that strengthen the capacities of families and communities, and to adopt and enforce effective legal frameworks, safeguarding children is the responsibility of everyone.

— Susan Bissell, PhD, Associate Director, Chief Child Protection, Programmes, UNICEF

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The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989, is a powerful addition to the international human rights framework. While great progress has been made on children’s rights over the past 20 years, much work remains to be done.

I am not actually a victim. I am a survivor working as a strong activist against trafficking. I will live and work to help others, and eventually die here.

— Anita, former child sex slave, The Day My God Died, India

The girls who live at the railway station usually take to prostitution. They often become pregnant, leaving their babies and then their babies end up just like them.

— Tanya, 14, Children of Leningradsky, Russian Federation

I was 9 years old, and on my way home, when the war crossed my path. I ran into a gang and I was really scared. So I decided to become one of the fighters of the group.

— Spencer, former child soldier, Behind Closed Eyes – No Bush for a Bad Child, Liberia

It’s very difficult and it can be frustrating sometimes, because you want to go to the shops or go to school or hang out with your friends, and if you do, when you come back in there will be shots firing. So it’s really difficult and stressful as a teenager.

— Sasha Kay, high school student, Trench Town: The Forgotten Land, Jamaica

The hardest thing is we can’t get jobs. There are no jobs in South Africa. I would take any job. I don’t care. I would do anything.

— Thembisile, 21 Up South Africa: Mandela’s Children, South Africa

That is my last step of childhood, high school, right here. So I’ll try to do real good. I think that people think a kid from Baltimore is supposed to grow up to be nothing. That we ain’t got no future simply because we from the ghetto. So I figure I’m gonna try and make a difference.

— Montrey, 12, Boys of Baraka, United States

For me to be able to get up and tell other people how I lived and how things have changed, I feel I am helping them. I was strong so that other people can learn.

— Penelope, 20, Where the Water Meets the Sky, Zambia (Camfed)