



West and Central Africa Regional Office

SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Developments, progress and challenges since the Yokohama Congress (2001) and the Rabat Arab-African Forum (2004)

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Executive summary

Sexual exploitation is a fundamental violation of children's rights. It is an attack on human dignity and inhibits the social and economic development of a country: destroying a child's life through sexual exploitation also destroys his or her chances of integrating into society.

The Stockholm First World Congress (1996) against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, and the Yokohama Congress in 2001, helped to raise awareness of the scale of the phenomenon, which is based on three closely linked themes:

- Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used for sexual purposes. In order to determine whether behaviour is abusive, it is important to consider certain criteria and the circumstances in which the act occurs. Sexual abuse is carried out by a person whom the child trusts, and could be a parent, brother, a member of the extended family, a teacher, a stranger or any other person in a position of power, authority or control over the child;
- Sexual violence is characterized by any type of sexual relations that are imposed by force, coercion, threat or surprise;
- Commercial sexual exploitation refers to the payment in cash or kind in exchange for sexual relations. In the region, it still occurs in an informal context and can appear in four forms: trafficking in children, prostitution, pornography and sexual tourism.

National situation analyses, specific studies carried out for several years by ministries, associations and multilateral agencies working on the sexual exploitation of children in West and Central Africa have all contributed to raising awareness of the characteristics and scale of this multiform phenomenon.

This situation analysis of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in West and Central Africa was prepared as part of the regional technical meeting on sexual exploitation of children held in Dakar on 24-25 September 2008. The objectives of the report are to trace the development of the phenomenon, to present actions to combat the different forms of sexual exploitation of children, and to propose recommendations. The report is based primarily on a literature review, country reports and surveys from the 24 countries in the region.

Since the Rabat Arab-African Forum (2004), the 24 countries¹ that comprise West and Central Africa have carried out over a hundred studies and analyses concerning sexual abuse and exploitation of children. This research has improved understanding of how abuse and exploitation can occur, as well as the determining factors and developing trends:

- Commercial sexual exploitation of children in all its forms appears to be intensifying. There are many links between trafficking for sexual purposes, child prostitution, sexual tourism and child pornography.
- Trafficking in children for economic reasons coexists with trafficking in children for sexual purposes. The development of sexual tourism leads almost inevitably to the development of child prostitution and child pornography (certain abusers film their victims). Regions that are popular for sexual tourism are also very often favourite destinations for trafficking, both internally and externally, in children for sexual purposes in order to meet the sexual demands of tourists.
- Sexual abuse and exploitation in conflict and post-conflict situations have undergone a change: offenders are predominantly civilians that are known to the victims.
- Sexual abuse, exploitation and violence in schools remain a concern.
- Girl domestic workers are often victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.
- There is a significant relation between the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and the worsening HIV/AIDS pandemic.
- The rate of early and/or forced marriages remains relatively high in many countries in the region.

¹ Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

- Sexual abuse and exploitation of children is a gender issue because girls are most affected. However, there are recorded cases of boys being victims of sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation (especially sexual tourism). In fact, certain foreign paedophiles (men and women) exclusively seek sexual relations with boys. The issue of boy prostitution remains taboo, particularly when it concerns homosexual relations. In certain countries where homosexuality is illegal, if a boy under 18 years old is raped, he can also be punished by law for having had homosexual relations.

In contrast, little information is available on sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against:

- Children within their family
- Street children and Islamic students (*talibés*)
- Children in institutions (orphanages, shelters and refuge centres)
- Children in conflict with the law, placed in detention
- Children living with a disability

The actual scale of all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation of children is difficult to determine for the following reasons:

- Low rate of reporting because victims fear reprisals, stigmatization and social exclusion;
- Persistent cultural resistance concerning sexuality and sexual violence;
- Cases are settled informally;
- No centralized system for collecting and processing data;
- No centralized system for monitoring and evaluating the situation of children and the impact of interventions;
- Weak judicial mechanisms and support services for victims that can guarantee protection and provide care;
- Impunity for certain offenders.

After analysing the determining factors in the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, it would appear that

- Certain social norms promote the persistence and intensification of particular forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation;
- Endemic poverty leads to worsening living conditions for children and make them more vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation;
- The HIV/AIDS epidemic is both a cause and consequence of sexual exploitation of children;
- Humanitarian crises stemming from conflicts or natural disasters increase children's vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation;
- The globalization of the sex industry has a strong impact on all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children;
- Trafficking networks are increasingly organized;
- All these factors are correlated and influence each other.

Despite numerous efforts by many countries in the region to develop national action plans, implementation is very often partial or incomplete due to a lack of follow-up support. There are a great number of constraints:

- Weak institutional capacity among those responsible for devising, implementing and monitoring action plans: weak capacity in the development, programming, management and monitoring and evaluation of strategies and programmes;
- Inadequate human resources in terms of numbers and quality: high mobility, inappropriate profile/post, concentration of personnel in urban areas to the detriment of the rural zones;
- Low budget allocation that is dependent in part on development partners, poorly understood budgetary procedures, and tardy disbursement of allocated funds;
- Multiplication of national action plans (trafficking in children, orphans/children vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, children in conflict with the law, etc.) can lead to overlap, and a lack of rationalization and optimization of available means;

- Inadequate or non-existent consultation and synergy between various ministries during development of plans;
- Inadequate or non-existent centralized information systems of monitoring and evaluation to measure developments in the situation of children.

There have been a great number of legislative reforms. However, in spite of these efforts, in many of the countries in the region, there are still gaps in the law relating to

- The legal age of marriage;
- Certain types of sexual exploitation: child pornography, sexual tourism and child prostitution;
- The principle of extraterritoriality;
- Protection and redress for children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation;
- Free medical and legal aid for children.

The effective application of laws is a considerable challenge in all countries in the region as a result of the following constraints:

- Lack of formal, institutionalized complaints procedure;
- Weak judicial systems;
- Reluctance of families to get involved in legal proceedings;
- Persistent reliance on traditional “laws”;
- Children and families unaware of their rights;
- Impunity.

Many awareness-raising campaigns involving the media, communities and children have been carried out. However, awareness is still fragmented, sectoral and often of limited duration; the messages are not always adapted to the target populations and their impact is not measured. Traditional behaviour and practices related to child sexual exploitation still persist. Social protection mechanisms for the most vulnerable populations suffer from ineffective implementation. Social inequalities remain commonplace.

Regarding the provision of specialized psycho-social care, reintegration and monitoring children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, numerous actions have been carried out, most often by NGOs. In fact, to compensate for the inadequate responses from ministries, many associations and NGOs have created their own programmes and structures; however, their activities are geographically limited and their care provision and monitoring capacities are weak. In addition, the number of spaces, centres and programmes specialized in hosting, counselling and offering psycho-social support, as well as reintegration and monitoring children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, also remain weak. Current capacity is already overextended.

These structures are not subject to regulation and are not supervised by the relevant ministry responsible. They present a great many constraints:

- No standards for child care provision;
- Lack of a specialized approach to the specific problems related to the sexual exploitation of children;
- Lack of qualified human resources;
- Inadequate financial resources, limiting intervention capacities and jeopardizing the long-term sustainability of their actions;
- Insufficient alternatives to reintegration;
- Difficulties in obtaining reliable data due to the absence of a system for collecting and processing information;
- Haphazard child monitoring mechanisms;
- No means for measuring programme impact on the evolution of the situation of children.

Despite greater visible participation by children, there is still room for progress as regards

- Access to civil rights for children concerning access to information and the freedom of expression and association;
- Allowing child victims to participate and taking their opinions into account;
- The functioning of children’s committees and parliaments;

- Skill in applying the participative approach by all actors involved with children.

Setting up control mechanisms for **intersectoral and multisectoral cooperation represents a major challenge for all countries in the region.** The development of a global, integrated system of child protection against all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation is wholly dependent on the quality of cooperation.

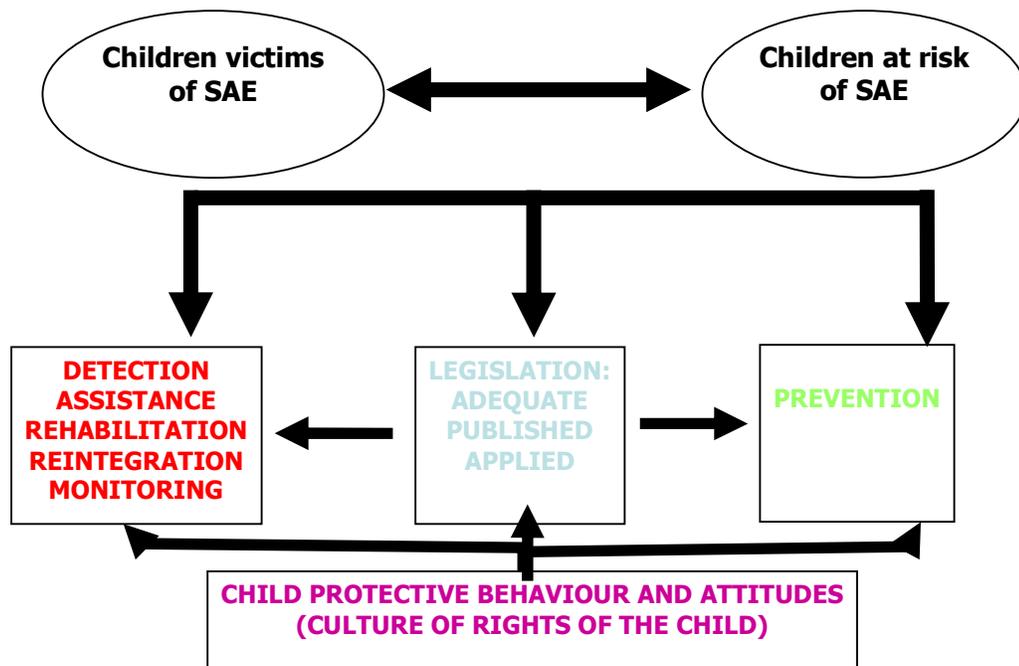
Indeed, establishing a realistic child protection system is dependent on particular constraints and risks related to

- The commitment of all the actors and partners concerned in achieving the anticipated results;
- Synchronizing the different components of a response;
- The institutional capacity of the ministry responsible for coordinating implementation and monitoring and evaluation;
- Interministerial coordination with respect to priority goals;
- The time frames for introducing legislative and institutional measures that have been identified;
- The availability of required human resources;
- The allocated budget and the timing of its disbursement.

The national action plan is not simply a list of activities and programmes supported by various actors, but should correspond to the implementation of this system of protection.

FIGURE 1

Child protection



Implementing such a system of protection is above all a process that is based on

- A complete adoption of the policy by all actors, not only in terms of content but also its principles and approaches;
- A programme that requires measurable results in terms of implementation of child rights interventions. The programme should ensure a rationalized and optimized use of resources; and
- Clarifying responsibilities of those in authority over children.

It is clear that the protection of children from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation depends above all on the effective commitment of the State. The degree of interest by public authorities in child protection, their realization of the scale of the problem and their determination to protect all children without distinction are of vital importance.

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Sexual exploitation of children

Sexual exploitation is a fundamental violation of children's rights. It is an attack on human dignity and inhibits the social and economic development of a country: destroying a child's life through sexual exploitation also destroys his or her chances of integrating into society.

Every study and survey regarding the sexual exploitation of children, whether for commercial reasons or not, indicates that it is both a cause and a consequence of other issues, such as poverty, changes in traditional modes of socialization and armed conflict. It is clear that a large majority of children victims of commercial sexual abuse, violence and exploitation are those who are already in a vulnerable situation.

Sexual exploitation of children is based on three closely linked themes:

- **Sexual abuse**¹ is the act in which a child is used for sexual purposes. The abuse is carried out by a person (adult or older child) whom the child trusts (parent, brother, a member of the extended family, teacher, guardian, etc.) or any other person in a position of power, authority or control over the child. The abuse may be physical, verbal or psycho-emotional. There is no informed consent from the child because of the pressure imposed by the adult, on whom the child is dependent or feels dependent: this pressure can cloud the child's judgement and restrict the independence of his or her responses. The pressure may be physical, but is most often psychological: seduction, praise, reward, blackmail and threats, as often about keeping the act a secret as about the act itself. The concept of sexual abuse is complex because it covers not only physical acts (molestation, rape), but also behaviour (harassment, attempted molestation or rape, sexual remarks) or even intentions (emotional or material blackmail, using deception).
- **Sexual violence**² is characterized by any type of sexual relations imposed on children by force, coercion, threat or surprise.
- **Commercial sexual exploitation**³ is characterized by the payment in cash or in kind in exchange for sexual relations and implies the idea of profit, whether economic, social or other.

The commercial sexual exploitation of children is defined as the sexual abuse of any person under 18 years old, for remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated both as a sexual object and as a commercial object. The commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery.

There are four main forms of commercial sexual exploitation: trafficking in children for sexual purposes, child prostitution, child pornography and sexual tourism involving children.

- Trafficking in children for sexual purposes refers to all acts related to the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children within a country or across borders, by means of deception, coercion or force, indenture by debt or fraud, for the purpose of putting children in a situation of sexual abuse or exploitation;
- Child prostitution means the use of a child for sexual activities for remuneration or other form of consideration;

1 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 34 and 35

2 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 34 and 35; WHO World report on violence and health (2002)

3 Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (Article 2); Stockholm Declaration; ILO Convention 182; Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons.

- Child pornography refers to any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes.
- Sexual tourism involving children is defined as the sexual exploitation of children by a person or persons travelling within their own country or travelling from their country to another country that is generally less developed, in order to indulge in sexual activities with children.

International political framework

As a result of the increase in the sexual exploitation of children, the international community has responded, beginning in 1996, by organizing several world congresses and regional consultations.

First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Stockholm

The First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children was held in Stockholm in 1996. The world congress offered a unique opportunity to encourage greater awareness and to attract worldwide attention to the sexual exploitation of children. The commercial sexual exploitation of children was thereby brought to the attention of the international community. Among the participants were the representatives of governments from 122 countries, United Nations agencies, NGOs and youth.

The participants in Stockholm unanimously adopted a “Declaration and Agenda for Action” and are committed to a global partnership against the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Agenda for Action comprised specific objectives in the areas of coordination and cooperation, prevention and protection, reintegration and participation of children. The Agenda stressed the importance of (a) setting up national agenda(s) for action to combat sexual exploitation of children, and (b) implementation and monitoring mechanisms, or focal sites at the national and local level, in order to collect and share data. To date, the Republic of Mali has not yet finalized a national action plan.

First regional Arab-African conference against sexual exploitation, violence and abuse of children, Rabat

With the aim of preparing for the 2nd World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Yokohama (Japan) in December 2001, a regional, Arab-African forum was held in Rabat in October 2001. The outcome of this meeting was the Declaration of the Arab-African Forum against Sexual Exploitation of Children.

The participants acknowledged that advances had been made since the first congress in Stockholm, notably in the domains of the commitment of political leadership at the highest levels; the existence of outlines for national action plans in some countries; the mobilization and participation of youth in the process of promoting and defending the rights of the child; the harmonization of legislation; and the recognition that the sexual exploitation of children is a pressing issue that requires the commitment of everyone.

However, the forum also recognized that the region still faced a number of challenges: the subject of sexual exploitation remains a taboo in many African societies; there continues to be a lack of data; there is a paucity of programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims of sexual exploitation; and the persistence of root causes such as poverty, illiteracy and certain cultural practices.

Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Yokohama

Five years after the first world congress, the international community met in Yokohama (Japan) to assess progress in combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The specific objectives of the meeting were to review developments in the implementation of the Stockholm Agenda for Action, to strengthen political commitments to the Agenda, to identify the major problems and gaps in the protection of children from sexual exploitation, and to exchange experiences and good practices.

One of the main outcomes of the congress was to reaffirm commitment to the Stockholm Agenda for Action in a declaration entitled, “The Yokohama Global Commitment 2001”. The participants in Yokohama welcomed the developments made to date, but also expressed their concern at the delays in the adoption of needed measures in various parts of the world.

Second Arab-African conference against the sexual exploitation of children, Rabat

The second Arab-African regional conference on sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against children was held in Rabat (Morocco) in December 2004. The main objective of this conference was to assess progress in implementing the commitments made in Stockholm (1996), Yokohama (2001) and during the first regional conference in Rabat (2001).

Participants reviewed developments since the first world congress in Stockholm in 1996: several countries ratified international conventions; numerous countries set up Focal Point ministries with the task to coordinate actions; some countries implemented a national action plan; several countries harmonized their national legislation with international conventions and/or developed specific legislation related to children.

Various actions were proposed to consolidate what had been accomplished in the previous years, for example, to develop clear definitions of the various dimensions of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence; ratify international conventions; improve data collection; raise awareness and promote training (which should involve the media and children themselves); develop monitoring systems and strengthen partnerships.

III World Congress against Sexual exploitation of Children and Adolescents

This congress is to take place in November 2008 in Rio (Brazil). As part of the preparatory work for this congress, an African regional technical meeting was held in Dakar (Senegal) on 24-25 September 2008.

Regional context

This report concerns the situation of child sexual exploitation in the 24 countries of West and Central Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. In this region, the sexual exploitation of children is expressed in multiple forms, often little known and often hidden by a cloak of silence, because it is culturally inappropriate to discuss sexuality, especially with children. Despite almost non-existent statistics and data on the issue, many countries in the region have carried out situation analyses that show the existence of the phenomenon and identify certain characteristics.

Nowadays, none of the countries in the region can claim to have been spared from this issue. But also, none can state with any precision how many children are victims of this form of exploitation, because for the most part it operates underground and there is still no method to determine the scale of the problem. There is a lack of statistical data and consequently the resources made available to prevent and combat the problem remain limited and have only relative impact.

Nevertheless, in the last few years, an increasing number of field surveys and studies have been carried out by governments, associations and international agencies to try to better understand this phenomenon and its causes. In West and Central Africa, the country studies and situation analyses that have been carried out highlight particular trends and variations.

However, these analyses and studies need to be updated in order to review the current situation of the phenomenon and the progress made in implementing the recommendations from the congresses in Yokohama and Rabat.

OBJECTIVES

Based on the previous studies prepared for the conferences in Yokohama in 2001 and in Rabat in 2004, and on various situation analyses and action plans developed by countries in the region, the scope of the present report is to present an updated review of the situation of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in West and Central Africa. In particular, the objectives are to

- Define the forms and scale of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in West and Central Africa; present and analyse the regional and sub-regional specificities (structural and/or temporary) of these phenomena;

- Identify and analyse the underlying causes of these phenomena: political, socio-economic, socio-cultural, environmental, etc.
- Analyse the various forms of response to sexual abuse and exploitation of children (prevention, alleviation, social rehabilitation) by the different actors (families, communities, national and local government offices, civil society, international institutions and NGOs.
- Present the development of measures undertaken within the framework of National Action Plans and implementation of the recommendations proposed by the conferences in Yokohama and Rabat;
- Identify the areas where interventions are inadequate;
- Propose recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

This report proposes a review of the situation of the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the 24 countries of West and Central Africa, and the responses that are currently being developed by the various actors involved in child protection (prevention, rehabilitation, reintegration, participation and cooperation).

The report is based on a literature review of various studies and surveys as well as reports prepared in the 24 countries, country and region analyses from UNICEF, and the results of a questionnaire sent to the 24 countries in the region and completed by government services and those working in the protection programme in UNICEF.

PART 1

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISSUE

SCALE, FORMS AND TRENDS IN SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

In accordance with the commitments of the Arab-African conference in Rabat in 2004 and in line with the monitoring process of the Yokohama congress of 2001, numerous studies and situation analyses on sexual exploitation of children in West and Central Africa have been prepared by ministries, associations and multilateral agencies.

In fact, the countries in the region have carried out more than **a hundred studies and situation analyses**, which provide a rich source of information and a better understanding of the characteristics and causes of sexual exploitation of children.

These documents are an indication of the strong acknowledgement by States of the existence of sexual exploitation of children and of their commitment to set up child protection measures.

A number of countries, supported by international technical and financial partners, have set up a data collecting and processing system.

Although these studies and situation analyses are a rich source of qualitative information concerning the forms, causes, consequences, experiences and perception of sexual exploitation of children, the figures do not reflect reality in the sense that it is extremely difficult to collect quantitative information, as a result of the **low reporting rate of cases, and the absence of centralized information and monitoring/evaluation systems concerning the situation of children.**

The Regional Analysis of Sexual Exploitation of Children in West and Central Africa, prepared by UNICEF (2004) for the Rabat Arab-African conference of 2004, highlighted the worsening situation of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in West and Central Africa and called attention to emerging trends, for example,

- Widespread and systematic rape of women and girls, used as a weapon of war in armed conflicts;
- Sexual exploitation of children in refugee camps by those in charge of their protection;
- Abuse and violence against girls in school;
- Intensification of the commercial sexual exploitation of children, especially in sex tourism, trafficking in children and pornography;
- Early and/or forced marriage of girls.

Since 2004, it would appear that sexual abuse and exploitation of children in West and Central Africa has continued to grow. Is it because the situation is getting worse or just the result of greater understanding of the issue?

All the forms of sexual abuse, violence and exploitation of children noted in 2004 still occur today, in various degrees; nevertheless, a number of emerging trends can be identified.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children in all forms: a worsening situation or just a better understanding of the phenomenon?

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (Declaration and Agenda for Action from the World Congress against Sexual Exploitation of Children; ILO Convention 182) is defined as the sexual abuse of any person under 18 years old, for remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated both as a sexual object and as a commercial object. The commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children is found in the region in all its forms: trafficking in children for sexual purposes, sex tourism; child pornography and child prostitution.

Trafficking in children for sexual purposes

Trafficking in children for sexual purposes refers to all acts related to the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children within a country or across borders for sexual purposes.

Trafficking in children for commercial sexual exploitation exists alongside trafficking in children for work purposes (UNICEF, 2006b).

There are an increasing number of national studies and surveys of trafficking in West and Central Africa. They reflect the growing commitment at the regional level to combat trafficking, most notably through the adoption in 2001 by the Economic Community of West African States of the declaration and agenda for action against trafficking, in particular of women and children. Although the research provides an outline to better understand this complex and multiform issue, to date there are no reliable data on trafficking in children. The figures put forward come either from field surveys where the range is limited, or from police stations, juvenile offenders department, vigilance committees and NGOs. The figures generally correspond to the number of child that have been intercepted and/or brought home.

In 2005, the U.S. Department of State published some figures that do not reflect the reality of the scale of trafficking:

- In Benin, more than 200 Beninois children were repatriated from Nigeria, in the period September to October 2003;
- In Burkina Faso, 640 children (of which 620 were from Burkina Faso) were intercepted in 2003;
- In the Gambia, more than 100 Ghanaian children were rescued from trafficking in February 2004;
- In Ghana, more than 100 Ghanaian children were repatriated in 2004;
- In Guinea, 600 children were removed from coffee and cocoa plantations and six boys on their way to Mali were intercepted in November 2003;
- In Mali, 112 children from Burkina Faso were intercepted in December 2003, and more than 600 Malian children were repatriated from Côte d'Ivoire between 2000 and 2003;
- In Nigeria, 10 703 children were repatriated in 2003;
- In Chad, 258 Chadian children were repatriated in 2004;
- In Togo, 2 458 Togolese children were repatriated between 2002 and 2004.

Sexual exploitation of children often coexists with their economic exploitation. UNICEF's 2005 study on trafficking in children in West and Central Africa clearly illustrates this coexistence:

- Children from Nigeria are victims of trafficking in Cameroon, where they work in plantations, street vending and prostitution ;
- In the large cities of Côte d'Ivoire, Abidjan and Bouaké, girls from the region, especially from Nigeria, are exploited for sexual purposes and as servants of street vendors;
- In the Gambia, as an example of internal trafficking, many girls are sexually exploited to satisfy the demands of tourists. Still in the Gambia, girls originally from Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone are sexually exploited;
- In Europe, mainly in Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, Ghanaian and Nigerian girls are victims of trafficking for sexual purposes. In Nigeria, according to the National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons, more than 50 000 Nigerian girls, whose ages were not mentioned, work in the sex industry in Italy, and that most of them were victims of trafficking;

repatriated victims told of how their living conditions were comparable to slavery and that they were forced to prostitute themselves and to pay pimps 40 000 to 50 000 euros to secure their freedom;

- During recent conflicts, the flows of trafficking have changed: for example, sexually exploited Nigerian girls are diverted from Côte d'Ivoire and relocated in Mali (Bamako, Segou and Sikasso);
- Niger is a transit country for Nigerian and Ghanaian girls who are sexually exploited in Algeria, Libya and Europe;
- In Nigeria, the well organized networks of traffickers constitute a hub supplying not only internal trafficking but also external trafficking to other African countries and Europe;
- In Senegal, girls are victims of internal trafficking for sexual purposes in tourist areas.

It is all the more difficult to know the real scale of trafficking in children for sexual purposes as internal movements within a country and between countries are complex and multiple.

Furthermore, to date there is no clear and harmonized methodology for collecting data.

The confusion over migration and trafficking, as well as the difficulty in identifying sexual and economic exploitation, also add to complicating collecting statistical data.

Sexual tourism involving children

Sexual tourism involving children is defined as the sexual exploitation of children by a person or persons travelling within their own country or travelling from their country to another country that is generally less developed, in order to indulge in sexual activities with children.

According to the African network of ECPAT International, the countries most affected by sexual tourism are Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal. The Gambia and Ghana would appear to be the most popular destinations, whereas Nigeria would appear to be a country of origin for sexual tourists visiting neighbouring countries.

In the Gambia, a study carried out by the Child Protection Alliance, ECPAT and Terre des Hommes on boys engaged in prostitution confirmed that the sexual tourism industry involved foreigners (men and women) travelling on organized trips for the purpose of sexual relations with young Gambian men. Several "bumsters" (young men/boys who present themselves as guides), some of whom were under 18 years old, were also involved in sexual relations or acted as procurers.

In Ghana, the NGO, "Coalition on the Rights of the Child", published in 2006 a report that stated that 56% of boys aged between 10 and 17 years old had been raped by foreigners. According to the same study, Ghana, in particular Cape Coast, would become a popular site for paedophile tourists because of the low prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS.

Sexual tourism involving children and trafficking in children for sexual purposes are two forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children that are closely linked: both are generated by the demand for sexual relations with children and both use the tourism industry – tour operators, the transport sector, nightclubs, bars and popular tourist destinations.

Child pornography

The "Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography" defines in Article 2(c) child pornography as "any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes".

In Cameroon, a study carried out by Association Enfants, Jeunes et Avenir in July 2006 (Mengue, 2006) highlights that adolescents aged between 14 and 20 years old are used in the production of pornographic materials; some victims are forced to participate, others receive remuneration. In the same report, certain neighbourhoods of Yaounde and Douala (Ekounou, Mvog-Ada, Pakita or "the crossroads of joy" and Mini Ferme Melen) have strip-tease clubs where boys and girls pose naked and are filmed.

In Senegal,¹ girls are recruited for the production of pornographic films, sometimes with sexual relations with dogs.

¹ Senegal survey response, 2008

In Nigeria, girls from Benin are reported to be used in the production of pornographic films (ECPAT, 2007a).

In Ghana, pornographic video cassettes featuring girls are reportedly in circulation (ECPAT, 2007d).

In addition, the absence of supervisory measures results in a high exposure of children to pornography in many of the countries in the region:

- Visiting cybercafés, where often very young children connect to pornographic sites;
- Projection of pornographic films that are accessible to minors;
- Rental of pornographic cassettes to minors.

Child prostitution

Child prostitution means the use of a child for sexual activities for remuneration or other form of consideration. Based on certain reports and information produced by country surveys, it would appear that the prostitution of girls is continually expanding.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a study on the sexual exploitation of children in the mining areas of Katanga and Kasaï reported that girls aged between 10 and 17 years old worked as prostitutes, either occasionally or permanently, in the neighbouring villages, inhabited quarries or residential neighbourhoods (UNICEF DRC, 2008).

In Cameroon, Kribi and Limbe have been identified as centres of child prostitution.

In Senegal, prostitution of minors occurs on beaches, in hotels, bars, nightclubs and other tourist places. In a system of sponsorship and adoption for money or services for the family, the child is subjected to sexual relations, often forced, with the guardian.

In Ghana, girl porters, “kayayes”, aged between 12 and 13, work as prostitutes in the streets, bars and hotels.

In Togo, a qualitative study of young female sex workers in Lomé prepared by PSI/Togo states that girls aged between 10 and 24 years old work as prostitutes in bars, restaurants, brothels or in other clandestine places. The Human Rights Watch report, “Borderline Slavery: Child Trafficking in Togo”, reveals that some girls were forced into prostitution in Lomé, in the neighbourhood called, *marché du petit vagin* (literally, “Little Vagina Market”).

In Burkina Faso, a survey of under-age female prostitutes in December 2005, carried out by the Department of Social Action and Education at Ouagadougou Central Town Hall, noted that girls under the age of 10 and living in the street or serving as a guide for beggars, are increasingly being driven into prostitution.

In Mali, a rapid assessment carried out in 2005 on commercial sexual exploitation of children highlighted the scale of the prostitution of girls aged between 12 and 18 years old. Most of them were Malian, but some came from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The prostitution takes place in the streets, in brothels and bars; in fact, several bars have rooms for this purpose. Some girls work during the day (street vendors) and work as prostitutes at night. The girls were introduced into sex work by a girl friend or other close friend or relative, or after having been tricked by adults who promised a better future. Some had suffered family pressures, and others were victims of trafficking or had fled armed conflict.

In the Republic of the Congo, a report prepared by UNICEF in 2007 shows that female street vendors aged between 12 and 15 years old are increasingly becoming victim to prostitution organized in bars or *ngandas*, in hotels or brothels. The girls are illiterate or have very little schooling and fall into the hands of networks of pimps who promise them a well paying job, or a visa for Europe or South Africa. The girls work seven days a week, three weeks per month (one week per month they are considered unavailable because of menstruation). They are subjected to verbal, physical and sexual violence by their pimps, and their possessions are often confiscated. Child prostitution is very lucrative and brings in a lot of money for pimps, on average 3 000 Francs CFA per trick. According to the report, the monthly turnover was estimated to be 2 100 000 Francs CFA (UNICEF, 2007d).

In Gabon, a survey carried out by the Ministry of National Solidarity, Social Affairs, Welfare and Poverty Reduction (2007) indicated an increase in under-age female prostitutes in Port-Gentil.

There is little documentation on the prostitution of boys because of the taboo surrounding homosexuality in many countries in the region.

Prostitution is closely linked to sexual tourism and child trafficking, as evidenced in the presence of brothels near borders, and the high visibility of child prostitution in tourist areas. The development of

sexual tourism in certain areas leads to a rise in child prostitution and child trafficking in order to satisfy the demand of sexual tourists. In addition, internal trafficking also encourages the development of prostitution.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children and HIV/AIDS

Research carried out in 2007 by ECPAT entitled, “The links between HIV/AIDS and commercial sexual exploitation of children in Africa”, affirms the high risk of HIV/AIDS infection by these children, as a result of

- The inability of the children to negotiate safe sex;
- Pressure from adults not to use a condom; the adults offer more money or spread inaccurate information about the importance of safe sex;
- Violence against the children; the children are often victims of rape;
- Low or no awareness of HIV/AIDS, of transmission modes and means of protection;
- Limited access to condoms;
- The use of drugs and alcohol by the children, which makes them even less preoccupied by safe sex.

Persistent sexual abuse and exploitation of children at school

A survey carried out by the regional office of UNICEF (2006a) in 2006 revealed that sexual abuse, exploitation and violence of children in school is considered to be a concern in most of the countries in the region. While only two countries (Mauritania and Sierra Leone) do not consider the problem to be a priority, almost half of the countries in the region consider it to be of moderate concern, whereas ten countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Mali, Niger and Sao Tome and Principe) consider it to be of serious concern.

The situations of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence can take seven different forms:

- Verbal sexual harassment by boys towards girls;
- Physical sexual harassment by boys towards girls;
- Sexual activity in exchange for good reports and grades;
- Sexual relations to pay for school fees;
- Girls seduced by teachers;
- Gang rape of girls by their class mates who consider the act as “disciplining” the victims;
- Sexual harassment of boys by their teachers.

School children in Nigeria and Cameroon are not only subject to all the forms of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence – with the exception of sexual favours in exchange for school fees (Nigeria) or sexual harassment of boys by their teachers (Cameroon) – but also to the worst form, which is gang rape by one’s peers.

Three forms of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence are encountered systematically in almost all countries in the region:

- Girls seduced by their teachers (21/22 countries mention it);
- Good grades in exchange for sexual relations (20/22);
- Verbal harassment by boys towards girls (19/22).

The most frequently cited situations of sexual abuse in the 23 countries are based directly on the position of authority occupied by teachers.

Teacher—student relations are marked by an abuse of authority based on the “legitimate” relation of superiority between teacher and student. The impact of these relations is to facilitate the students’ schooling (selling grades) rather than personal financial gain. Covering the cost of school fees in exchange for sexual favours was noted in seven countries,¹ whereas exchanging sexual favours for good grades was three times more frequently cited (20 countries).

¹ Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Already in 1994, interviews held in Burkina Faso with 15-19 year old students and other school personnel (teachers, heads of school, security staff) affirmed that “sexual harassment occurs through blackmail for grades, threats of failing school, physical force and aggravated assault”.

In Niger, the press commented more recently,¹ that “numerous students affirm that they have been victims of sexual harassment from certain teachers. It is claimed that these teachers impose intimate relations as a prerequisite to getting good grades.”

Corruption of female minors (seducing girls) by teachers is a notable concern because it is mentioned by all countries, with the exception of Sierra Leone (21/22). In contrast, sexual harassment of boys by teachers appears to be marginal because it is acknowledged only in Nigeria.

The responsibility of the girls in these situations as a whole would not appear to be significant, despite being noted in countries such as Benin, the Central African Republic, the Gambia and Guinea. In Guinea, for example, several studies have been carried out, in particular on prostitution in schools, and a workshop was organized in 2003 with the support of UNICEF. Thus the existence of girls sexually harassing teachers and vice versa was acknowledged.

Nevertheless, the suggestion that teachers may be victims of sexual harassment by girls seeking to survive or get ahead at school should not override the offence of gross misconduct committed by teachers who give in to student advances, nor the disciplinary and criminal consequences (if the girls are underage) should they engage in sexual relations.

Girls are subject to strong sexual pressure from their peers, whether following verbal harassment (19/22 countries) or physical harassment (16/22 countries). Situations of extreme violence such as gang rape of girls by their male classmates do not seem to be common, because they were reported by only Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria. The motivation for the rape was “to discipline girls who stepped out of line”.

Exposure of students to sexual abuse, exploitation and violence can create a climate in which school is host to other forms of non-sexual violence against children. In Togo, for example, research by UNICEF in 2002 shows that a frequent and common form of violence are “degrading remarks by teachers” towards students. The research also placed teachers in third place (after friends/neighbours and cousins) of perpetrators of sexual abuse, and in first place (before family) regarding physical abuse.

In addition, it should be noted that use of corporal punishment as an educational method in school also occurs frequently in countries of the region.

In this context, relations based on force and domination, including sexual relations, may be perceived as “normal” by different groups of actors in the school setting.

Any review of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against children at schools in countries of the region will be based on reports and cannot reflect the reality of the situation.

In Sao Tome and Principe, there has been an increase in the number of cases of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence at school relayed by the media.

Guinea affirmed that 32 girls had been victims of rape at school in 2004 and three in 2005.

At the same time, Cape Verde stated that, according to sources in the Central Schools Inspection, one case of sexual abuse had been reported in the first semester of 2005, against two the previous year.

In Ghana and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a number of studies highlight the proportion of students who have been exposed to sexual abuse, exploitation and violence. In one study carried out in 2003, 6 percent of girls questioned in schools had been victims of sexual blackmail regarding their grades, and 14 percent had been raped by their classmates, while 24 percent of boys admitted to having raped a girl or participated in a gang rape.

The real scale of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against children in schools remains unclear, for the following reasons:

- There are no centralized systems for reporting and monitoring at national level: none of the countries possesses a reliable database on this issue and are not able to provide a national estimate of the number of child victims;
- Only three countries (Ghana, Guinea and Sierra Leone) claim to have a centralized system, at national level, for recording cases of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against students;

¹ Jeunesse Info N°13, 21-30 April 2006.

- In cases where information is centralized, it is done so internally as part of an institutional framework defined by the Ministry of Education. In Guinea, for example, decentralized education services are responsible for forwarding data up the hierarchy to the National Department of Civic Education of the Ministry of Pre-University Education and Civic Education. In Ghana, Disciplinary/Welfare Committees, set up at different levels, are responsible for forwarding information to the central offices of the Ministry of Education. In Cape Verde, cases of sexual abuse at school are dealt with by the Central Education Inspection Services;
- At the same time, there are other institutional mechanisms capable of collecting information on sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against children, such as health structures or those police structures that deal with child protection, especially in cases of complaints;
- Aid mechanisms for children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation are limited. In Côte d'Ivoire, two free help lines to report cases of violence have been set up by NGOs (National Organization for Children, Women and the Family and the International Catholic Child Bureau), but case management is not centralized. In general, only six countries in the region have set up a free help line, SOS Children: Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Nigeria and Senegal.
- The number of cases of sexual abuse remains low, as a result of corporatism, resistance from parents and the State, of the culture of impunity, the mistrust of families and the fear of the child and his family becoming stigmatized.
- Settling cases informally is the most common outcome. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana and Sao Tome and Principe, for example, fear of stigmatization of the child and the whole family means that cases are dealt with within the family and are not reported to the appropriate authorities. In Togo, legislation encouraged the registration of complaints, and a large number of cases of abuse were reported. However, cases were not followed up adequately, especially by school authorities, and "the practice has fallen into disuse". The most common practice in Togo is to settle complaints informally between the teacher (if relevant) and the child's family in order to cover medical costs or responsibility for pregnancy. In Nigeria too, the number of cases of sexual abuse and exploitation are considered to be under-reported. Cases are dealt with internally within the school itself, including medical needs, and rarely go higher in the school system or cross to other social services.
- Disciplinary measures are rarely applied. Only six countries (Cape Verde, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Senegal and Togo) confirmed the existence of a system of sanctions against heads of school for failing to report cases of sexual abuse and exploitation involving students. The disciplinary measures are defined either specifically in the codes of conduct or ethics codes for education personnel (e.g. Ghana), or more generally by codes covering the status of public sector employees (e.g. Cape Verde and Nigeria). The effectiveness of these codes is debatable, however, since it would appear that, as in Guinea, the sanctions are rarely applied.

Changes in sexual abuse and violence in conflict and post-conflict situations

Gender-based sexual violence and variations of violence

In 2004, the Arab-African Forum highlighted the sexual abuse and violence against women and girls as a result of conflict and large-scale displacements, in particular

- The widespread and systematic rape of women and girls, used as a weapon of war in armed conflicts;
- The sexual abuse of girls in refugee camps by those in charge of their protection. In most cases, families were aware of the practice but closed their eyes because it was a means for survival, as indicated in the expression, "food for sex".

Many of the countries in the region (Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) have recently experienced armed conflict, with the following consequences:

- Massive human rights violations, characterized by murders, torture, rape and other acts of sexual violence, forced labour, trafficking in persons and forced recruitment of child soldiers;

- Large-scale displacements of populations both within the affected country and towards neighbouring countries. There are currently one million displaced persons in West Africa, of which 800 000 are in Côte d'Ivoire, 12 000 in Senegal and 10 000 in Guinea-Bissau.

Gender-based sexual violence occurs most often in periods of armed conflicts and during displacement of the civilian population. The most affected are women and girls:

- 40 percent of women and girls in Liberia have been abused;
- 37 percent of prostitutes in Sierra Leone are under 15 years old;
- 94 percent of displaced households in Sierra Leone have experienced torture, rape or even sexual slavery;
- 50 percent of all women and girls in Sierra Leone have been subject to sexual violence.

Several thousand civilians are still currently victims of these conflicts, in particular women, children, adolescents, refugees, internally displaced persons and nationals from other countries. In addition, a climate of insecurity and impunity persists in certain countries even after armed conflict has ended. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, in May 2006, forced displacements were reported to be continuing (towards Diezoun), as were acts of violence carried out by militia and security forces in the presence of children attached to armed groups (UNOCHA, 2006).

A study carried out by International Rescue Committee in 2007 on child sexual abuse in West Africa noted that in Sierra Leone, cases of rape of girls under 18 years old accounted for 83 percent of cases reported to the police (in 2003) and 87 percent of victims taken into care by Rainbow Centres were under 15 years old, with the youngest victim aged only two months (in 2007).

In Côte d'Ivoire, a study prepared by Amnesty International (2007) emphasizes the rise in sexual violence against women and children, including rape, especially in the north and in the poorer areas of the country. In 2007, Human Rights Watch published a report entitled, "My Heart Is Cut: Sexual Violence by Rebels and Pro-Government Forces in Côte d'Ivoire" that investigated 180 cases of sexual violence in Côte d'Ivoire: rape, gang rape, sexual slavery and forced incest. These abuses were perpetrated by rebels or pro-government forces against women and girls, some aged barely six years old. Some abuses were committed in front of other family members. A number of girls were kidnapped for the purpose of sexual services over a long period. There were numerous consequences for these women and girls: death, pregnancy, vaginal fistulas, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, sterility, stigmatization, exclusion, psychological trauma and depression.

In the Republic of the Congo, a study carried out by UNICEF (2007e) showed clearly the persistence of sexual violence – especially rape – after conflict had ended. This sexual violence, and again, rape in particular, underwent a change in profile: contrary to what happened during the war, after the conflict, there was an increasing number of civilian perpetrators who were known to the victims (in 50 to 80 percent of cases), and who were even related to the victim in 20 percent of cases. The majority of victims were girls of an increasingly young age (approximately half of victims were minors, and a quarter under 13 years old) and who were educated (approximately half of victims had reached secondary education). In the case of minors, the assaults tended increasingly to be repeated (in around half the cases) and to be perpetrated by a single person (in around 60 percent of cases). The assaults took place at home or in other private and/or familiar places to the victims. The perpetrators justified their action, above all, by the misbehaviour of the women.

For the large majority of victims, serious and multiple traumas and injuries result from this sexual violence:

- Medical consequences: there are often vaginal lesions, risk of infection from HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy;
- Psychological consequences: huge numbers of cases of stress, depression, anxiety and a tendency towards addictive behaviour;
- Social consequences: because the victims are often blamed for their misfortune, they are criticized, marginalized and sometimes even rejected by their family or friends, which in turn can lead to further problems, such as quitting school or work. It is this pattern that leads to some child victims to drop out of school and live in the street.

Victims of sexual violence rarely have access to support services. When support exists, it is almost always restricted to rape victims. Approximately half of all victims seek assistance from medical services and/or community structures, especially the church. In contrast, less than one victim in three

seeks legal support of any kind. Settling cases informally, especially cases of assaults within the family, is a very common practice. The prevalence of this practice, which is unlawful for criminal offences, can be explained by the fact that complaints procedures are expensive and rarely lead to the offenders being convicted (only about 5 to 7 percent of reported cases), whereas the informal process maintains social cohesion and avoids shaming the family. Unfortunately, this practice trivializes sexual assault because it encourages impunity and repeat offending.

Gender-based sexual violence is undergoing a change in profile and would appear to be becoming something commonplace and trivialized because of the ineffective application of social and judicial disciplinary responses; yet the injuries and trauma that result from these assaults remain as serious as ever.

A UNICEF survey carried out in 2008 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo concerning combating sexual violence emphasized that women and girls were the main victims of rape. Girls under 18 years old represented 25 percent of the total victims in 2007, soaring to much higher levels in certain regions (82 percent in Tshikapa, western Kasai). Among the underage children were some extremely young victims: 22 percent of girls assisted by the NGO Kitumaini were under 12 years old, with the youngest aged only 30 months.

In the large majority of cases, the perpetrators were civilians; the exception was in Kivu, where, in 2007, uniformed men accounted for 76 percent in south Kivu and 62 percent in north Kivu. The involvement of civilians varied between 75 percent in Equateur, 80 percent in Kananga and 93 percent in Tshikapa and Kinshasa.

Civilian offenders are most often known to their victims because they are part of the victim's family (father, uncle, cousin, etc.) or close contacts (neighbour, fellow student, teacher, etc.). In these cases, the assaults are repeated over several months or even several years until they are discovered or reported.

The number of underage girls that were admitted to General Panzi Hospital (south Kivu) for treatment of vaginal fistulas was 179 in 2003, 327 in 2004, 458 in 2005, 349 in 2006 and 235 in 2007.

Sexual abuse and violence against refugee/displaced children

The sexual abuse of refugee/displaced children persists in spite of the measures introduced following the report published in 2002 by the High Commissioner for Refugees and Save the Children concerning refugee camps in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The report was based on 1 500 interviews and described sexual abuses committed against girls aged 13 to 18 years old in refugee camps by aid workers and national military personnel responsible for security inside and around the camps.

In 2005, a Save the Children discussion paper called "From Camp to Community: Liberia study on exploitation of children" (2005) studied the opportunities available to Liberian children to provide for themselves and highlighted the fact that transactional sex was the only immediate means of survival for these children.

In 2008, Save the Children UK published a report entitled "No one to turn to" (2008a), which was based on interviews with 341 persons living in chronic emergencies, including 129 girls and 121 boys aged 10 to 17 years old. The research identified every kind of child sexual abuse and exploitation: trading for sex for food and other non-monetary items or services; forced sex; verbal sexual abuse; child prostitution; child pornography; sexual slavery; indecent sexual assault and child trafficking linked with commercial sexual exploitation. Girls aged 14 to 15 years old were the most commonly identified victims.

In this study, Save the Children emphasizes the underestimation of the number of cases reported, as a result of

- Absence of reporting mechanisms for children;
- Children at high risk;
- The power and impunity with which offenders act;
- The collusion of some parents;
- High rate of non-response to allegations concerning cases of sexual abuse committed by United Nations personnel;
- Absence of a standard system for information and monitoring concerning child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Links between sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations and commercial sexual exploitation of children

A 2008 survey carried out by GTZ in Côte d'Ivoire indicates that the number of girls victims of trafficking and prostitution networks had doubled or even tripled, depending on the place, since the end of the crisis: 42 percent of girls were older than 16; 50 percent of girls were aged 15-16; 7 percent were 13-14; and 1 percent was under 12 years old; 53 percent were Ivorian and 47 percent were foreigners, mainly Nigerians. As a result of the high rate of unprotected sex, 52 percent of girls surveyed had contracted a sexually transmitted disease. Boys were also reported to be victims of prostitution (GTZ, 2008).

Child sexual exploitation takes place in bars, in houses converted into brothels, and in market places after dark. Increasingly well organized networks operate in complete impunity and in collusion with local authorities, security forces, family members, bar and brothel owners, transporters, etc.

Links between sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations and HIV/AIDS

When rape becomes a weapon of war, the HIV/AIDS epidemic intensifies, affecting the raped girls and women. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS estimates that HIV/AIDS rates of infection among combatants are three to four times higher than among the local populations.

In addition, armed conflicts increase exposure of populations to HIV/AIDS infection as a result of

- high mobility of troops;
- high number of displaced persons;
- widespread economic collapse, which drives populations into extreme poverty and forces women and girls into prostitution for money or "protection".

The total number of child victims infected with HIV/AIDS as a result of sexual violence in a conflict or post-conflict situation is unknown.

Sexual abuse and exploitation of child domestic workers

In all countries of West and Central Africa, a large number of children are employed as domestic workers; it is the most common cultural practice and the most deeply ingrained. Child domestic labour is easily confused with traditional practices of informal adoption (*confiage*) and "initiation into life and work".

In addition, there is a high demand for child labour, which underlies the phenomenon of internal trafficking in children from rural areas to cities, and external trafficking (between different countries in the region).

According to UNICEF (2007f), many children are victims of economic exploitation in West and Central Africa, and most of them are used as domestic labour. Girls are the most exposed to this practice and almost 90 percent of child victims of this economic exploitation are girls. They are used for domestic labour and commercial activities, the main occupations of their "guardians".

A 2007 Human Rights Watch report on the exploitation and mistreatment of girls working as domestic labour in Guinea revealed the difficult living conditions of these girls – some barely aged 8 years old – who work up to 18 hours a day, often without pay. They are not allowed to leave their employer's house and have no access to support outside. They are very often verbally, physically and sexually abused by their employers. Domestic labour is the most common category of work among children in Guinea, and girls come from as far away as Mali to work there.

The children are placed in domestic service directly by their parents or are recruited via intermediaries.

The need to provide for themselves and their family is often given as a reason to justify domestic labour. Several children exploited as domestic workers do so to reimburse loans. Older children may migrate and look for work in cities, with the aim of continuing their education. Family problems are often a catalyst that pushes children to begin working. Family break-ups, as well as physical and sexual abuse within families are typical causes for children to leave home and seek other means of subsistence. Several children cited their father's alcoholism among the reasons for leaving home and starting employment as domestic workers. Children are also attracted to domestic labour by their brothers, sisters and friends who already work as domestic labourers.

According to ECPAT (2007f), factors that facilitate sexual exploitation of child domestic workers include

- The length of time spent in the house, especially when the female employer is absent ;
- The idea that the child belongs to the employer, with the implication of “owner’s rights” to use the child for sexual purposes;
- Blackmail or threats when the child makes a mistake (for example, keep quiet when objects get broken, when the wash is badly done, when the food has not been well prepared, etc.
- Compensation for financial and material support provided to the family of the child domestic worker, or the promise to increase the child’s wages.

Child domestic workers who are victims of sexual abuse and exploitation rarely report their mistreatment:

- Child domestic workers are young and often illiterate; consequently, they do not have the skills, nor the opportunity, to seek help in leaving an abusive work environment;
- Most child domestic workers are confined to private houses and do not attend school, only going out for quick errands; they have irregular contact with their families;
- Many girls tolerate abuse because they do not have money or other resources needed to return home;
- The girls are also afraid of their employer’s threats of violence or of reporting them to the police;
- Some children prefer to remain silent about their abuse because of the financial pressure and debts that an escape would create;
- The sexual abuse offenders, typically men, consider the girls as powerless and threaten them if they dare to report the abuse. The impunity of some of these men means that they can continue raping these children in their house.

The actual number of child domestic workers who are victims of sexual abuse and exploitation remains unknown at this time.

The persistence of early and/or forced marriages

In West and Central Africa, the marriage of often very young girls is common practice that stems from tradition. In the Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Niger, more than 60 percent of girls are married by the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2007g).

Early or forced marriage is a form of child sexual exploitation since it is generally not possible for the child to choose. One of the reasons commonly given by parents to justify their daughters’ early marriage is that it protects them from possible pre-marital sex or pregnancy and therefore to preserve their virginity. This justification stems from moral, cultural and religious principles that attach great importance to virginity. Because the practice is socially acceptable, girls are not able to oppose it.

Furthermore, forced marriage is also used as an economic survival strategy for poor families. It can be considered as a form of commercial sexual exploitation of children: an adult, by means of a dowry for the parents, buys the services of a minor to be his spouse, which for the girl very often means a life of sexual and domestic servitude.

According to UNICEF’s State of the World’s Children 2007, the rate of early marriages remains relatively high in West and Central Africa. Across the region, the average rate of women aged 20 to 24 years old who were married before the age of 18 is 44 percent: 28 percent in urban zones and 56 percent in rural zones, with differences between countries.

The highest rates are in Niger (77 percent), Chad (72 percent), Guinea (65 percent), the Central African Republic (57 percent), Burkina Faso (52 percent); and the lowest are reported in Togo (31 percent), Côte d’Ivoire (33 percent), Gabon (34 percent), Senegal (36 percent), Benin and Mauritania (both 37 percent).

These figures can be explained by the fact that

- Legislation against early marriage, in accordance with ratified international instruments, has not yet been implemented in some countries;
- Even when legislation against early marriage exists, it is respected very little or not at all, and is applied rarely or not at all;
- Traditional laws persist in certain regions.

Early marriage places girls at greater risk of mistreatment and exploitation. It often leads to dropping out of school prematurely and thus failing to acquire the skills that could give them greater autonomy. Thus they become totally dependent on their husbands. When girls try to escape marriage, they most often find themselves without an education, or the means of earning their living, separated from their family environment and therefore at high risk of falling into prostitution as a means of survival. In addition, early marriages lead to early pregnancies, with their own share of complications, such as vaginal fistulas.

Conclusions

It would appear that there is greater awareness of certain forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the region as a result of

- Numerous situation analyses carried out in countries in the region ;
- Improved information and training of personnel engaged in child protection;
- Establishing procedures for detecting and providing care for children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation;
- Awareness-raising activities with children, families and communities; and
- Setting up an information system within child reception structures.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children in all its forms appears to be intensifying. There are many links between trafficking for sexual or labour purposes, child prostitution, sexual tourism and child pornography.

Trafficking in children for economic reasons coexists with trafficking in children for sexual purposes. The development of sexual tourism leads almost inevitably to the development of child prostitution and child pornography (certain abusers film their victims). Regions that are popular for sexual tourism are also very often favourite destinations for trafficking, both internally and externally, in children for sexual purposes in order to meet the sexual demands of tourists.

Sexual abuse and exploitation in conflict and post-conflict zones has undergone a change: most perpetrators are civilians known to their victims.

Sexual abuse, exploitation and violence in schools remain a concern.

Girl domestic workers are often victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Sexual abuse and exploitation has a significant negative impact on the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The rate of early and/or forced marriages remains still relatively high in many countries in the region.

Sexual abuse and exploitation of children is a gender issue because girls are most affected. However, there are recorded cases of boys being victims of sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation (especially sexual tourism). In fact, certain foreign paedophiles (men and women) exclusively seek sexual relations with boys. The issue of boy prostitution remains taboo, particularly when it concerns homosexual relations. In certain countries where homosexuality is illegal, if a boy under 18 years old is raped, he can also be punished by law for having had homosexual relations.

In contrast, little information is available on sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against:

- Children within their family
- Street children and Islamic students (*talibés*)
- Children in institutions (orphanages, shelters and refuge centres)
- Children in conflict with the law, placed in detention
- Children living with a disability

The real scale of all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation of children is difficult to determine for the following reasons:

- Low rate of reporting because victims fear reprisals, stigmatization and social exclusion
- Persistent cultural resistance concerning sexuality and sexual violence
- Cases are settled informally
- No centralized system for collecting and processing data
- No centralized system for monitoring and evaluating the situation of children and the impact of interventions

- Weak judicial mechanisms and support services for victims that can guarantee protection and provide care
- Impunity for certain offenders

Furthermore, it is currently difficult to make a comparative analysis of the 24 countries in the region – with the aim of identifying specificities and developing trends in child sexual exploitation by country – because of the reasons given above.

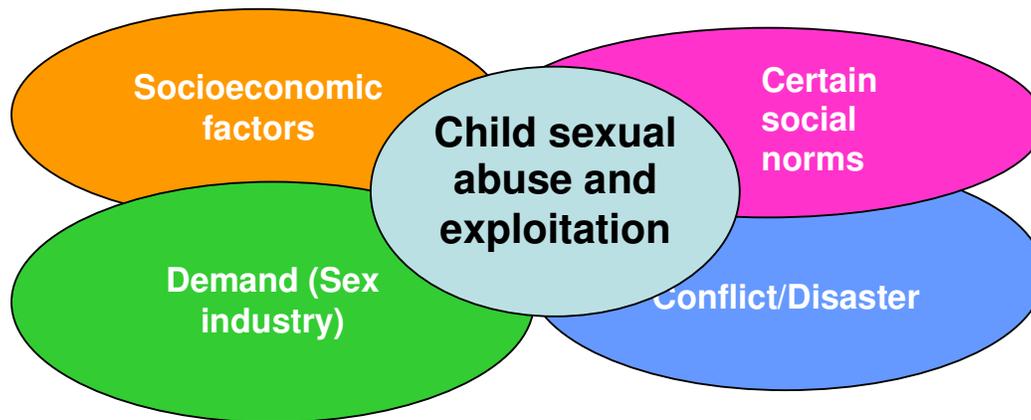
DETERMINING FACTORS IN SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

In West and Central Africa, a host of determining factors combine and inter-connect, leading to increased risk for children and persistent child sexual exploitation. These factors are grounded in the social context in which the child lives and develops, and relate to

- Certain social norms (perceptions, practices, traditions and behaviour);
- Endemic and structural poverty: monetary poverty, poverty of living conditions and poverty of potential;
- Humanitarian crises created by conflicts and natural disasters; and
- The global development of the sex industry.

FIGURE 2

Determining factors: multiform dimension and inter-correlation



Influence of social norms

Social norms consist of rules of conduct and models of behaviour prescribed by a society. They are rooted in the customs, traditions and value systems that gradually develop in a society.

Social norms affect all aspects of a person’s activities: personal, familial and professional. They very often have a regional or national character, and show large differences in terms of geography.

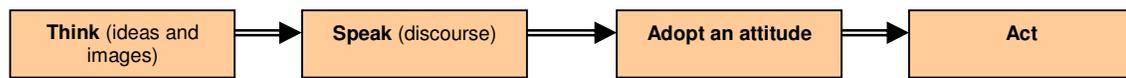
Social norms are the expression of a collective group. They are subject to a social learning process and serve as a means of transmission of social values. Norms refer to

- Behaviours and conduct (behavioural norms)
- Judgements, attitudes opinions and beliefs (judgement norms).

Social norms are based on psycho-socio-cultural perceptions. These perceptions are a set of ideas, images, opinions, representations and mental attitudes that people apply to facts and phenomena. The basis of perceptions is what people think of a given phenomenon, which is expressed through what they say, their attitudes and behaviour (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

Process and progress of perception



Analysis of all the studies of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence of children in West and Central Africa highlights the social norms that influence the existence and persistence of these phenomena.

It is important to analyse the causal links between social norms and child sexual exploitation, with the aim not only of improving understanding but more importantly of improving perception.

Persistence of certain subjective perceptions

- *The definition of a child, as formulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, has not been absorbed by everyone.* In West and Central Africa, the actual age (referring to the date of birth) does not define a child and is not taken into account. The concept of childhood is blurred with infancy or even pre-adolescence. Childhood ends with the onset of puberty, when secondary sexual characteristics appear: body hair, breasts, menstruations, deepening of voice and development in height and muscle.

Entry to the adult world is marked by an initiation ritual that prepares girls and boys for their new responsibilities and roles that they will have to lead in their adult life.

In practice, it is the community's judgement on the physical, psychological and behavioural development of the child that determines the change in status from child to adult. The real age is of little significance: with the first visible signs of pre-puberty, the minor is no longer considered as a child in the eyes of society; he or she is now expected to behave as an adult and, more importantly, will be considered as such.

- *Restricting children's voices.* Social stratification based on age does not accord independent status to children. Traditionally, a child's opinion is neither respected nor taken into account by their family or community. Parental authority, as well as the authority of any adult, is absolute. Children cannot dispute what adults say, nor refuse to obey their orders. Children interiorize these values and therefore accept parental authority quite easily, as well as the authority of older people outside the family circle; they even seem to seek it. Traditional culture is strongly patriarchal and dictates the power struggle between the elderly and youth on one hand, and between men and women, on the other hand.
- *Discrimination against women and girls.* In a strongly masculine society, the unequal social status of women leads to clear discrimination against girls. A girl's destiny is very often marriage – the only means for her to secure her future and that of her family. Her education is oriented towards learning housekeeping skills and looking after her brothers and sisters. Attending school is therefore not encouraged or is easily interrupted: the literacy rate in West and Central Africa (2000-04) clearly illustrates the discrimination in terms of schooling: 38 percent of literate women compared with 60 percent of men (UNICEF, 2007g: 121).

Parents tend to have different expectations of girls than of boys. From a very young age, children are socialized in such a way as to integrate the roles associated with their parents: boys are expected to imitate their fathers; girls their mothers. Gender discrimination, in the guise of tradition or religion, may prevent girls from access to education and professional training, and instead drive them to early marriage. One consequence is that girls leave their community to look for employment that will pay enough to buy their trousseau for marriage.

The high prevalence of predefined gender roles is a key factor in determining the sector of employment for girls and boys. Boys tend to work in the mining sector (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Niger), in agriculture (Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Nigeria), in service activities (working as porters, for example), or in fishing (Ghana); whereas girls tend to work mainly as domestic workers or family helpers, food sellers (Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon and Mali) and in restaurants. The roles assigned by society predispose girls to work in sectors on the borderline of

the law (for example, domestic work, restaurants and bars), where there is greater risk of increased exploitation, including sexual exploitation, especially for those that do not have a legal status.

In traditional society, in which highly patrilineal and patriarchal structures predominate, women are considered as inferior to men. Men hold legal authority; the role of housekeeper is assigned to women. Men generally have the right to greater sexual freedom (although certain ethnic groups tolerate girls having premarital sexual relations). The rate of polygamous marriages remains relatively high in West and Central Africa: more than 40 percent of married women are in polygamous relationships, whereas the percentage is 20 to 30 percent in East Africa and 20 percent or lower in southern Africa.

Marriage is not considered as a contract between a man and a woman, but rather an alliance of families: the point of view of the individual getting married, in this case, the girl, is therefore not paramount. This explains why arranged marriages are considered to be part of tradition and culture, and not perceived as early and/or forced marriages.

- *Sexuality: transfer and acquisition.* Sexuality remains a subject of taboo, or is even forbidden by tradition or religion (Islam, especially). Ignorance, apprehension and feelings of shame prevent parents from discussing sexuality with their children for fear that they awaken their curiosity and encourage sexual debauchery. Questions about sexuality are therefore discussed by adolescents of the same sex, between brothers and sisters, more rarely with teachers.

Learning about sexuality (Ndiaye, 2003) takes place through formal processes (initiation ceremonies that still exist in certain traditional societies but which are disappearing through urbanization and the changes in sexual practices in society) as well as informal means (relations with one's peers or older people; speeches, songs, stories and myths featuring sexuality; the media, etc.). In addition, high mobility (migratory traditions, conflicts or exoduses) leads to a reformulation of cultural models (models related to the body, sexual practices, notions of risk, crossing boundaries, etc.).

- *Accepted violence.* The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children (United Nations, 2005) underlined that violence against children within their families is very widespread. Violent acts are not always perceived as such by everyone. Children react with silence and submission. In this context, violence has a tendency to become commonplace or trivialized.

Intrafamilial sexual abuse is highlighted in all reports; victims tend to keep quiet and hide sexual violence committed within the family, out of fear or shame.

Resorting to corporal punishment as an educational method in schools is also commonplace in countries of the region. In several countries of the region, schoolchildren (especially in primary school) receive corporal punishment from teachers, who use canes, whips, or even punches and slaps to the head, or force students to grovel on their knees, to mention only the most common punishments (United Nations, 2005).

A national survey carried out in Burkina Faso in 2008 estimated that 83.6 percent of children had suffered physical violence. Among the adults interviewed, 16.3 percent considered that violence is sometimes necessary in education (Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity/UNICEF, 2008).

In this context, relations of force and domination, including those of a sexual nature, can be seen as "normal" by all actors present.

- *Not all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation are considered as such.* A sociological study carried out in Togo in 2006 (MPASPF/PEPA/UNICEF, 2006) concerning sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against children reported that the only acts that are considered unacceptable are the following:
 - Rape and abuse of girls below the age of puberty;
 - Father—daughter incest;
 - Sexual abuse of students by teachers; and
 - Forced sexual relations that lead to death, pregnancy or physical injury requiring serious medical treatment.

In contrast:

- Prepubescent or pubescent girls are not considered to be victims but responsible for their misfortune on account of their provocative attitudes and dress;
- Child prostitution is categorized as a case of loose morals. Under-age prostitutes are rarely considered to be victims of sexual exploitation. Prostitution is seen as exclusively feminine,

- because the notion of male prostitution is culturally unacceptable (sexual relations between men are shameful and embarrassing);
- Early and/or forced marriage (frequent in Islamic regions) is considered as a preventive measure against promiscuity and debauchery; it strengthens bands between clans and families; and it is considered as an act of reparation in the case of rape, sexual abuse or pregnancy.
- *Settling cases informally or by traditional law.* Denunciations are rare. Few children and families of victims register complaints because of
 - Ignorance of the law;
 - Limited access to police and legal services due to financial and geographical constraints;
 - Fear of reprisals and the fear of stigmatization; and
 - Mistrust of judicial procedure.

Most cases are settled informally, between the family of the victim and the perpetrator. Sometimes the family of the victim, or the victim herself, will resort to revenge or sorcery.

Tribal chiefs (MPASPF/PEPA/UNICEF, 2006) or traditional leaders may be called on to make a decision in certain situations. Offenders get off with paying fines in cash or kind to organize atonement ceremonies. Injured girls may be treated with traditional medicine.

When the perpetrator in a case of rape or sexual abuse is a teacher or civil servant, parents may see it as a blessing, given the social status of these professions, and a “marriage of reparation” may be considered.

Persistence of certain harmful practices to children

- *Female genital mutilation (FGM)/cutting.* FGM is still practiced in certain regions, sometimes illegally, despite multiple efforts to eradicate it through laws banning cutting, numerous sensitization programmes, etc.

Although the practice has been reduced in some countries (Senegal, in 2005, 28% women cut), the percentage of women aged 15 to 49 having undergone FGM/cutting remains very high in Burkina Faso, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali and Sierra Leone. There are of course differences within a given country, with sometimes significant differences between ethnic groups.

FGM occurs for a number of reasons:

- Psycho-sexual: to reduce female sexual desire, preserve chastity and virginity before marriage, as well as faithfulness during marriage, and to increase male sexual desire;
- Sociological: out of respect for cultural traditions, to initiate girls into their status as adult women, social integration and preserving social cohesion;
- Hygienic and aesthetic: in some societies, female genital organs are considered unclean and unsightly; they are therefore removed for hygienic and aesthetic reasons;
- Religious: FGM/cutting occurs in certain communities that wrongly believe the practice is demanded by religion (in this case, Islam);
- Other reasons: to increase female fertility, increase the chances of infant survival and increase the chances of having a male child.

A commonly held belief is that not cutting will lead to sexual debauchery; as a result, girls that do not undergo FGM/cutting suffer increased stigmatization (Population Council/USAID, 2008).

Early marriage of girls is closely linked with FGM because the practice is a precondition for marriage in some regions.

- *Practices similar to early and/or forced marriage:*
 - *Trokossi.* In Ghana, Nigeria and Togo, the traditional practice of *Trokossi* is still present, despite being outlawed. Girls under 12 years old are given to sorcerers (*féticheurs*) as a form of reparation for an offence committed by a male member of their family. The girl becomes the property of the sorcerer and lives a life of domestic and sexual servitude. Thousands of girls are estimated to be living in sorcerers’ shrines.
 - *Ebisa.* This practice occurs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and consists of giving the younger sister of a sterile wife as a second bride to the husband.

- *Marriage as a transaction.* Girls are sometimes given in marriage in order to pay off family debts, to get land or even to settle disputes between families or clans (IPPF/UNFPA, 2006).

The girls are married without their informed consent and live in domestic and sexual servitude. Girls that refuse their condition and flee, have to move to other towns or communities, for fear of being forced to return or of reprisals. Subsequently, they often become victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

Changing traditions

- *Links between migratory traditions and trafficking in children for sexual purposes.* Migration is a characteristic phenomenon in West and Central Africa and is part of a historic tradition marked by a community with a shared language and cultural, ethnic and religious values.

Migration, both internal and cross-border, addresses individual motivations (seeking economic or professional opportunities) and family or intra-community motivations, as survival strategies or placing children for social or educational reasons.

Permanent or seasonal migrations from one country to another or within a single country (from Sahel zones to the coast) are determined by poverty, worsening living conditions, recurrent drought, armed conflict and/or political instability.

Another type of migration, in the region of Sourou in northern Burkina Faso and in the Dogon region of Mali, is that of children to towns during the dry season (UNICEF, 2005). This voluntary migration has a significant cultural and economic dimension as an initiation ritual: to see the city lights, establish some capital (for girls, pay for their trousseau) and then return to their village.

These perpetual migratory movements are rooted in the history and culture of the region, and in survival instincts. They also led to the development of trafficking for economic and/or sexual purposes. Traffickers take advantage of internal and cross-border migrations, especially of women and children, in order to divert them into the circuits of trafficking for sexual purposes through the use of coercion or deception.

- *Links between informal adoption (confiage) and child sexual exploitation.* Informal adoption is a widespread practice in West Africa and involves giving the child to a relative or friend in order to be educated. It is an ancient cultural tradition that is considered to contribute to family solidarity.

However, as a result of the endemic poverty that exists in many countries in the region, the tradition has tended to take on a negative aspect, losing its positive social value to become a form of child economic exploitation.

The practice of *vidomégon* in Benin offers a good illustration of how this tradition has been subverted: middlemen go from village to village promising or handing over money in exchange for their children whom they subsequently place with a third party in the city. The children (mainly girls) are used as domestic workers and are often victim to sexual abuse and exploitation.

- *Links between begging by Islamic students (talibés) and sexual exploitation.* In Islamic societies in West and Central Africa, parents sometimes entrust their children to religious teachers, or *marabouts*, in order to learn the Koran. This “educational” practice has been subverted into child exploitation: Koranic teachers send the boys out every day to beg in the streets of large cities; the boys, aged 5 to 15, have to bring back money for the teacher and also get their own food.

Furthermore, this practice is also a cover for trafficking in children: in the streets of Dakar, for example, there are *talibés* from neighbouring countries (the Gambia, Guinea, Mali and Mauritania) as well as Senegalese children from rural areas who have been brought to the city by the *marabouts* (UNICEF, 2005).

These children live in the streets, left to themselves in very difficult conditions, are often victim to sexual abuse and exploitation.

Changes in traditional child protection and socialization mechanisms

African societies are in constant flux and development, leading to a change in traditional socialization mechanisms.

Extended, community-based solidarity networks and family/community protection measures are no longer effective, due to chronic poverty, increased urbanization, armed conflict, HIV/AIDS and mass population displacements.

Changes in the notion of the family are characterized by a questioning of the value of the extended, community form of family and the progression of new family models that are more “individualistic” and “contractual”.

There is a breakdown in inter-generational protection mechanisms and a shifting of responsibility onto youth, with poorer families and communities having increasing difficulty in taking care of their children. The children are therefore left to themselves and have to “get by”; the street becomes a key place for socialization, albeit uncontrolled.

The children also become an integral part of the survival mechanism set up by the family. Many children work in order to meet their own and their family’s needs. According to the International Labour Organization, approximately 48 million children aged 5 to 14 are engaged in some kind of economic activity, that is 29 percent of the population of children. According to research (UEMOA, 2005) into employment and the informal economy in the economic capitals of seven countries in the West African Economic and Monetary Union (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo), early entry of children into the work market is a concern: 13 percent of children aged 10 to 14 are economically active, with a higher number of girls (16 percent) than boys (10 percent).

Families no longer represent a point of reference and a safe place for children. Although the actual scale of the problem remains unclear, acts of child sexual abuse and violence committed within the victim’s family are highlighted in almost every analysis and study carried out by countries in the region.

Furthermore, armed conflict, natural disasters (floods), large-scale population displacements, as well as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, deprive populations, and especially women and children, of traditional family and community support systems. Families are broken up: women who are separated from their husband and extended family have to raise their children with few resources; children are separated from their family and there is often no adult to turn to for protection.

To make up for the loss of traditional mechanisms, children and youth seek other socialization and protection mechanisms and networks: NGOs, religious group, state authorities, etc.

As part of the socialization process, children and youth are confronted with a multitude of values and references: some traditional, conveyed by the community; the others modern, conveyed by other actors who refer to the universality of rights.

A 2007 study by Plan International on children and youth in West Africa reveals that the notion of a community in terms of a physically delimited space is not the main reference for the children and youth interviewed. Throughout their development, children and youth refer to multiple peer communities (real or imaginary) with whom they share temporarily interests, risks, values and aspirations (Plan International, 2007).

Growing consumerism

For children living in poverty, the temptation of the consumer society draws some children, especially girls, into prostitution, although often on an occasional basis. For example, in certain countries in the region, school girls have sexual relations with adult (“sugar daddies”) in exchange for gifts and/or money. In this way, these adolescents have secret relations with well-off adults (foreigners or nationals) in order to attain a different lifestyle and/or consumer goods (cell phones, clothes, etc.) in exchange for sexual relations.

This practice is often encouraged by parents in so far as the relation is of economic benefit to the whole family. The practice is further facilitated by the collapse of traditional systems for child support and by the profound changes in African families.

HIV/AIDS and the sexual exploitation of children: a vicious circle

- *HIV/AIDS increases vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation.* In West and Central Africa, the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate among adults is 3.5 percent, the second highest rate after East and Southern Africa. The highest prevalence rates are in the Central African Republic, Gabon and Côte d’Ivoire, with respectively 10.7 percent, 7.9 percent and 7.1 percent. The regional prevalence rate among youth aged 15 to 24 is 0.8 percent for men and 2.5 percent for women. The number of children living with HIV/AIDS is 650,000 and the number of children orphaned by AIDS is 3,300,000.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic represents a significant challenge for the region, given the increase in the number of children and families affected by HIV/AIDS. A study carried out by UNICEF in 2003 estimated that, by 2010, 20 million African children under the age of 15 will have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS (UNICEF, 2004).

Children who are more vulnerable as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic include the following groups:

- Children having lost one or both parents
- Children who have an infected parent
- Children living in poor households with orphans
- Children who are seropositive

These children suffer severe psychological distress, exacerbated by stigmatization and discrimination, and excluded from the community, school, health care, etc.

Living conditions are often difficult for these children, and they have to take on adult responsibilities. With no resources and no protection, they often become victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, or trafficking for economic or sexual purposes.

In addition, people who have assumed guardianship of a girl orphaned by HIV/AIDS often offer her for marriage, in exchange for a dowry (ECPAT, 2007f).

- *Sexual exploitation increases vulnerability of children to HIV/AIDS.* Children who are victims of sexual exploitation do not consider HIV/AIDS prevention to be a priority for the following reasons:
 - They will do anything to survive;
 - They have little or no information about modes of HIV transmission or prevention;
 - They do not have easy access to condoms;
 - They are unable to negotiate safe sex: adults who want unprotected sex will use force, offer more money or even give false information to get what they want;
 - They are reassured by a regular clientele.

Furthermore, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has led adults to seek sexual relations with increasingly younger children, with the idea that younger children have a greater chance of being healthy.

Another important observation is that sexual tourism is changing destination, choosing countries with low prevalence rates (for example, Ghana), thereby intensifying trafficking in children for sexual purposes and child prostitution in the preferred region of choice (ECPAT, 2007g).

Conclusion

The fact that certain social norms influence the existence and persistence of sexual abuse and exploitation of children does not mean that there are no “child protective” norms; in fact, those social norms that address child protection and socialization have received little attention. They deserve to be studied further and brought to the fore.

The analysis of social forms should not be based on generalized hypotheses, given that West and Central Africa represent a huge area in which several societies coexist, with several cultures that may be endogenous (traditional) and exogenous (modernity, development, globalization, etc.), and in a permanent state of accelerated changes.

The repercussions of poverty

West and Central Africa is one of the poorest regions in the world. According to the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) in 2007, the region includes the twelve poorest countries in the world: Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Mali, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Benin, Guinea, Nigeria and Senegal (UNDP, 2007).

While all the countries in the region are committed to developing poverty reduction policies, only a few of them can show any positive results: in Ghana, the poverty rate went from 52 percent in 1991/92 to less than 29 percent in 2005/06. However, in other countries, especially petrol exporters, economic growth has led to social inequality. Also, there are still large disparities in countries in the region between the coastal and Sahel zones (notably in Ghana and Nigeria).

Armed conflicts have exacerbated poverty rates: In Côte d'Ivoire, the poverty rate went from 34 percent in 2002 (before the conflict) to 48 percent in 2006.

Climate change is affecting a large number of countries, with desertification in the Sahel zones and strong floods. For example, Mauritania has recently experienced successive droughts and floods, worsened by an invasion of locusts; all of which led to a large cereal deficit and a worsening of the food crisis.

As in previous years, malnutrition and the lack of food security remain a serious concern. According to 2008 estimates, in the Sahel, 1.4 million children under the age of five are under-nourished; of these, 380 000 suffer from severe and acute malnutrition.

The region of West and Central Africa has a very high under-five mortality rate: 190 per 1 000 live births.

Cholera remains endemic in eight countries in the region, while meningitis epidemics have affected 12 countries in the past two years; Burkina Faso alone accounted for 30 000 persons infected.

Although there has been relative progress in the rate of school attendance in a number of countries in the region, it is still the case that the education system is often inadequate:

- High cost of school supplies
- Absenteeism among teachers
- Not enough teachers
- Dilapidated infrastructures and equipment
- High rate of students repeating a year
- Violence against students
- Gender-based disparities
- Low retention rates
- Low quality teaching

Birth registrations are still low: in 2005, the percentage of children over the age of five is 44 percent, of which 59 percent are in urban zones and 34 percent in rural zones (UNICEF, 2007g).

TABLE 1

Country	HDI rank (2007)	Gross primary enrolment rate (2005)		% children reaching grade 5 (2005)	Under –five mortality rate (2005)	Child workers as % of age group (2004)
		Boys	Girls			
Benin	163	111	86	92	150	26
Burkina Faso	176	59	47	76	191	39
Cameroon	144	113	108	-	149	22
Cape Verde	102	108	109	94	35	-
Central African Republic	171	76	52	70	193	27
Chad	170	86	56	64	208	36
Congo	139	92	85	-	108	25
Côte d'Ivoire	166	80	63	95	195	18
Dem. Rep. of Congo	168	51	46	54	205	28
Equatorial Guinea	127	133	121	72	205	-
Gabon	119	130	129	91	91	11
Gambia	155	79	84	96	137	32
Ghana	135	90	87	98	112	11
Guinea	160	87	71	94	150	29
Guinea-Bissau	175	84	56	85	200	36
Liberia	-	115	83	-	235	13
Mali	173	71	56	93	218	49
Mauritania	137	95	93	69	125	21
Niger	174	52	37	89	256	43
Nigeria	158	107	91	97	194	23
Sao Tome and Principe	123	134	132	69	118	-
Senegal	156	78	74	93	136	25
Sierra Leone	177	169	122	93	282	13
Togo	152	110	92	88	139	26

Source: UNDP, 2007

The link between poverty and child sexual exploitation is highlighted in every study and analysis carried out in countries of the region. Endemic poverty remains principally rural. However, given the rural exodus, anarchic urbanization, high rates of unemployment and the lack of basic infrastructures and social services, urban poverty is becoming increasingly visible.

Living in poverty, with no access to basic social services and no opportunities, families and children adopt survival strategies that may endanger the children. Children who are informally adopted and handed over to traffickers may become victims of sexual abuse, early and/or forced marriage, trafficking for sexual purposes, prostitution, sexual tourism and/or child pornography.

The non registration of children at birth is also a factor of vulnerability: the children become easy prey for traffickers of children for sexual purposes.

Conflicts and humanitarian crises

- *Conflicts.* A number of countries emerging from conflict (Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone) are still suffering from the aftermath of years of conflict and instability. Internal conflict continues in some countries, creating insecurity in certain regions: the north-west of Central African Republic; North and South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Pool in Congo; Niger; and western Chad.

Armed conflicts affect the security and welfare of the most vulnerable populations, especially children, for the following reasons:

- Worsen living conditions (exacerbate economic crises);
- Destroy infrastructures;

- Cause massive population displacements both within a country and cross-border: in West Africa alone, almost one million people have been displaced (UNHCR, 2007).

It is evident that conflicts have an impact on sexual abuse and exploitation of children:

- Cut off from their families and willing to do anything to survive, children find themselves at the mercy of abusers or child trafficking networks;
 - Widespread and systematic rape of women and girls during conflict have used as a weapon of war;
 - Conflict and post-conflict situations create a climate of instability and impunity that allows sexual abuse and exploitation of children to continue.
- *Natural disasters.* In 2007, the wet season was marked by flooding, among the heaviest in the last ten years in West Africa. More than 600 000 people in 13 countries were affected (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo).
These natural disasters cause massive population displacements, destroy infrastructures and worsen living conditions for the population, especially women and children, who often have to adopt survival strategies. Children are thereby exposed to all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Development of the sex industry: a lucrative and well organized market

- *Development of sexual tourism and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.* Many countries in the region are experiencing an influx of tourists, both regional and international. In 2006, the World Tourism Organization highlighted the high growth of tourism in Africa: nine percent higher than the previous year, that is, approximately 36 715 000 tourists (WTO, 2006).
Although the development of international tourism generates economic growth and development in Africa, it also brings greater exposure of children to commercial sexual exploitation. For example, a number of countries in the region and certain areas within them have become favourite destinations for sexual tourism, which often operates in complete impunity because of the absence of any control mechanism for tourism, the absence of punishments for the exploiters and the absence of a system of child protection.
- *Access to new technology: easy and uncontrolled.* With the development of modern technologies and communications, the region has witnessed the creation of a great number of cybercafés, where children, often very young and especially in urban areas, have easy and uncontrolled access to the Internet. The children can therefore access pornographic sites and can “chat” with paedophiles or sexual tourists. The children can thereby become victims of sexual tourism and child pornography.
- *Well informed, structured and organized networks.* Trafficking networks have become highly structured and take advantage of
 - the vulnerabilities of children and their families;
 - easier access to the countries (more flights to Africa, development of road infrastructure);
 - porous border between countries in the region;
 - the absence of specific legislation for the different forms of child sexual exploitation;
 - weak child protection mechanisms;
 - the culture of impunity that reigns in certain countries.

These networks are thereby able to regulate the supply and demand for the market, a market that would appear to be highly lucrative but for which no global study has yet been carried out.

Conclusions

After analysing the determining factors in sexual abuse and exploitation of children, it would appear that

- Certain social norms promote the persistence and intensification of particular forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation;

- Endemic poverty leads to worsening living conditions for children and makes them more vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation;
- The HIV/AIDS epidemic is both a cause and consequence of sexual exploitation of children;
- Humanitarian crises stemming from conflicts or natural disasters increase children's vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation;
- The globalization of the sex industry has a strong impact on all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children;
- Trafficking networks are increasingly organized;
- All these factors are correlated and influence each other.

PART 2

RESPONSES TO PREVENT AND COMBAT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

In accordance with the commitments made by governments through the adoption of the Stockholm, Yokohama and Rabat declarations, as well as through ratification of international and regional instruments, most countries have prepared strategies and national action plans, and have initiated legislative reforms with the aim of preventing and combating the phenomenon of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

The situation in 2004

Out of the 24 countries in the region, 13 had developed or were in the process of developing national action plans, and 11 had no national action plan. At the institutional level, a ministerial focal point had been created, hosted in various ministries, depending on the country, but including the Ministry for Social Affairs, Social Protection, Solidarity, Children, Women, Family, Justice or Health.

The situation since 2004

States in the region are increasingly committed to the fight against sexual abuse and exploitation of children. This commitment can be seen in the drive to implement the action plans that have been developed, or to develop national action plans (NAPs) in most of the countries in the region.

In many countries in the region (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone), the implemented NAP have only carried out part of the actions planned, or have not covered the whole territory, or could not respect the schedule. Effective implementation of the NAP was hindered by a number of difficulties related to the absence of planned budget; the lack of human resources in terms of both number and quality; and coordination problems among all the actors.

In Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, NAPs target mainly gender-based violence.

Some countries have opted to develop and implement a national policy for child protection (Benin and Ghana).

Some countries have developed NAPs but have been unable to implement them due to lack of financing (Côte d'Ivoire).

Some countries have still not developed a NAP (Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Togo).

Challenges and constraints

Although much effort has gone into developing NAPs, implementation is very often partial or incomplete because support measures do not follow through.

There are numerous constraints:

- Weak institutional capacity to design, implement and monitor the NAPs: weak capacities in designing, programming, managing and monitoring and evaluation of strategies and programmes;
- Shortage of human resources both in terms of numbers and in quality: high mobility; inappropriate matching of profile and post; and a concentration of personnel in the urban zones, to the detriment of the rural zones;
- Low budget allocation, dependent in part on development partners; poor understanding of budgetary procedure; slow allocation of funds;
- The quantity of NAPs (child trafficking, orphans/children at risk from HIV/AIDS, children in conflict with the law, etc.) can lead to overlapping, an absence of rationalization and optimization means available;
- Little or no consultation or synergy between various ministries during the development of the plans;
- Minimal or no centralized information systems or monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that could measure developments in the situation of children.

NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE CAPACITIES TO PROTECT CHILDREN

Harmonization of national legislation with ratified international instruments

Ratification of international instruments

All countries in the region have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); many countries have subsequently ratified several additional conventions and protocols in order to strengthen their legal system for protection against sexual exploitation of children (Table 2)

TABLE 2

#	Country	CRC	Sale of children protocol	ILO Conv. 138	ILO Conv. 182	Trafficking women and children protocol
1	Benin	Ratified 1990	Ratified 2005	Ratified 2001	Ratified 2001	Ratified 2004
2	Burkina Faso	Ratified 1990	Ratified 2006	Ratified 1999	Ratified 2001	Ratified 2002
3	Cameroon	Ratified 1993	Signature 2001	Ratified 2001	Ratified 2002	Ratified 2006
4	Cape Verde	Accession 1992	Accession 2002	X	Ratified 2001	Ratified 2004
5	Central African Republic	Ratified 1992	X	Ratified 2000	Ratified 2000	Accession 2006
6	Chad	Ratified 1990	Ratified 2002	Ratified 2005	Ratified 2000	X
7	Congo	Accession 1993	X	Ratified 1999	Ratified 2002	Signature 2000
9	Côte d'Ivoire	Ratified 1991	X	Ratified 2003	Ratified 2003	X
8	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Ratified 1990	Accession 2001	Ratified 2001	Ratified 2001	Accession 2005
10	Equatorial Guinea	Accession 1992	Accession 2003	Ratified 1985	Ratified 2001	Ratified 2003
11	Gabon	Ratified 1994	Ratified 2007	X	Ratified 2001	X
12	Gambia	Ratified 1990	Signature 2000	Ratified 2000	Ratified 2001	Ratified 2003
13	Ghana	Ratified 1990	Signature 2003	X	Ratified 2000	X
14	Guinea	Accession 1990	X	Ratified 2003	Ratified 2003	Accession 2004
15	Guinea-Bissau	Ratified 1990	Signature 2000	X	Ratified 2008	Ratified 2007
16	Liberia	Ratified 1993	Signature 2004	X	Ratified 2003	Accession 2004
17	Mali	Ratified 1990	Accession 2002	Ratified 2002	Ratified 2000	Ratified 2002
18	Mauritania	Ratified 1991	Accession 2007	Ratified 2001	Ratified 2001	Accession 2005
19	Niger	Ratified 1990	Ratified 2004	Ratified 1978	Ratified 2000	Ratified 2004
20	Nigeria	Ratified 1991	Signature 2000	Ratified 2002	Ratified 2002	Ratified 2001
21	Sao Tome and Principe	Accession 1991	X	Ratified 2005	Ratified 2005	Accession 2006
22	Senegal	Ratified 1990	Ratified 2003	Ratified 1999	Ratified 2000	Ratified 2003
23	Sierra Leone	Ratified 1990	Ratified 2001	X	X	Signature 2001
24	Togo	Ratified 1990	Ratified 2004	Ratified 1984	Ratified 2000	Signature 2000

Ratifying these international instruments by countries in the region involves changing national legislation to adapt or include new legal principles. In the region, there has been significant progress with respect to harmonizing national legislation with international instruments:

- Laws relating to child protection have been introduced or are the process of being adopted: Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and Sierra Leone;
- Laws relating to child trafficking have been introduced or are underway in Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mauritania and Togo;
- Laws banning the practice of female genital mutilation: Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Togo;
- Laws on HIV/AIDS prevention, supervision and control;
- The Children's Code has been adopted or is in the process of being adopted in Benin, Congo, the Gambia, Ghana, Senegal and Togo;
- Revision of the penal code: Benin and Chad;
- Law criminalizing sexual exploitation of minors under the age of 18: Congo and the Gambia;
- Laws or measures to outlaw sexual harassment of students at school: Ghana and Togo;
- Extraterritorial laws in cases of trafficking: Nigeria with Europe.

Regional instruments

In addition to ratified international instruments, countries have adopted specific regional mechanisms:

- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- Bilateral or multilateral protocols of agreement related to combating trafficking in children, with the aim of intercepting the traffickers, and repatriate the children (Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Togo).

Challenges and constraints

Despite these efforts, in many of the countries in the region there remain gaps in the law regarding

- The legal age of marriage;
- Certain forms of sexual exploitation: child pornography, sexual tourism and child prostitution;
- The principle of extraterritoriality;
- Measures of protection and compensation for children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation;
- Free medical and legal aid for children.

Difficulties in applying the law

In every country in the region, the effective application of law is still a problem: the number of children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation that have access to legal protection remains low, and a large number of offenders benefit from total impunity. There are many factors that explain the difficulties in applying the law.

- *Low rate of reporting.* The number of reported cases of sexual abuse and exploitation remains low because there are few or no support mechanisms that are easily accessible to children and that guarantee their protection. NGOs that offer support services for children rarely act as plaintiffs, and the children and their families are not well aware of the resources available (telephone helpline, counselling centre, etc.).
- *Access difficulties for children.* In order to begin legal proceedings against the offender and obtain compensation, the victim must press charges with the police. In some countries in the region, the minor must be accompanied by a relative or guardian. The immediate consequence is that children who are victims of sexual abuse within their family, or children without family, cannot press charges.

A number of countries have set up procedures that allow the child to go to the police unaccompanied (Benin), or to call a free telephone number or make a simple oral or written accusation (Cameroon).

In order to facilitate procedure and to guarantee confidentiality in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation at school, a system that allows anonymous accusations has been set up in some countries (the Gambia, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone).

- *Proving sexual abuse or exploitation: an additional difficulty.* It is up to the victim to provide proof of sexual abuse or exploitation by way of a medical or forensic certificate. However, victims are unaware of this obligation, and in any case, the expense of obtaining a certificate inhibits beginning legal proceedings. Victims do not have access to free medical and legal aid.

In addition, the victim's age is of fundamental importance in order to qualify the offence; yet many children were not registered at birth and can therefore not prove their status as a minor.

- *Ignorance of the law.* The children and their families have limited or no knowledge of laws concerning child protection, and are therefore not even able to demand and defend their rights. Illiteracy means that people do not have direct access to understanding the law.
- *Significant lack of materials and qualified human resources.* Child protection units and juvenile courts do not exist in all countries, and there are strong disparities within a single country, which makes access to the police and legal services all the more difficult.

Due to a lack of resources, police and legal services do not all have special places for children that can guarantee confidentiality and their protection during multiple hearings.

The number of police officers and judges that have received special training in the protection of minors remains very low.

The lack of resources also makes intersectoral cooperation more difficult (police-justice-health education).

Special training courses have taken place for all personnel involved in legal protection for children, but there are sporadic and sectoral.

To compensate for this deficiency, paralegals have been trained to work with communities that do not have close access to legal/police services.

- *Informal settlements and compensation determined by the community.* Families of child victims, especially in rural areas, tend to resort to
 - Settling cases informally by direct negotiation with the offender;
 - The traditional chief, who will decide on the terms of the sanction against the offender and the traditional purification ceremonies;
 - Sorcerers.

The reasons for resorting to this type of settlement include the following:

- The shame and taboo that surround sexuality;
- The fear of reprisals and stigmatization;
- The influence of social norms;
- The lack of trust in justice (corruption, impunity, etc.).

In this kind of settlement, the interests of the family and the community take precedence over that of the child.

- *The slow speed and cost of legal proceedings drive families and victims to abandon their case or to withdraw.*
- *Sanctions are not always in accordance with the law* due to
 - The difficulty some judges have in qualifying the offence, given the multiplicity of concepts;
 - Leniency in sentencing;
 - Lack of deterrent measures;
 - Pressure from offenders;
 - The not-illegal status of certain forms of child sexual exploitation;
 - Impunity of some offenders, thanks to their social status.
- *Compensation for harm.* Compensation for harm done to the child is not systematic. When it occurs, it is often to the benefit of relatives or third parties.
- *Little or no regular monitoring of places associated with child sexual exploitation.* Although some countries have introduced monitoring mechanisms for bars, dance clubs and hotels, they are not used regularly. When police raids occur in these places, it is the child victims who are rounded up.
- *Effective application of the law is a significant challenge* in all countries in the region because of the following constraints:

- Lack of institutionalized system for accusations;
- Weak judicial systems;
- Reluctance of families to deal with legal issues;
- Continued reliance on traditional “law”;
- Ignorance of children and their families of their rights;
- Impunity.

PREVENTION

Actions implemented

Awareness-raising campaigns and advocacy

In terms of prevention, countries in West and Central Africa have made considerable efforts to

- Raise awareness among populations of sexual abuse and violence against children;
- Raise awareness and inform populations about HIV/AIDS;
- Inform populations about the rights of the child and child protection laws;
- Change some social norms associated with sexual exploitation;
- Promote a culture based on the rights of the child.

These campaigns consist of

- Organizing sensitization days, educational discussions and seminars ;
- Producing material such as posters, comic strips for children, handbooks, brochures, radio and television announcements, etc.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a national campaign, “VDAY” is in preparation, with the theme, “Stop the rape of our most valuable resource: The rights of women and girls in DRC”. A film on the life stories of victims of sexual violence in DRC will soon be shown in churches and schools.

Ministerial circulars and orders have been introduced in many countries in the region with the aim of preventing sexual abuse and exploitation of children in schools.

Involvement of the media

The media’s involvement varies according to the country, but in general they play a significant role. The press denounces cases of child sexual exploitation and ensures the transmission of information to the general public. In Mauritania, radio and television programmes are presented by children; Cameroon broadcasts television debates; and the Central African Republic and Togo broadcast radio programmes concerning child sexual exploitation.

In Benin, Senegal and Togo, networks of journalists for the protection of the rights of the child have been formed. Members are trained in the ethics and practical details of presenting information concerning children.

Community involvement and participation

Much effort has gone into mobilizing community involvement in order to gain a strong commitment to preventing and combating sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

The results obtained by the NGO TOSTAN in Senegal clearly illustrate the importance of community involvement in preventing FGM and early marriages. The introduction of the “public statement”, a heavily mediatized event that unites all communities, has led to the abandon of FGM and early and/or forced marriage in 3 140 communities in Senegal, that is, 62.8 percent of the 5 000 communities where these practices occurred.

This community-based initiative has also led to an improved awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention, systematic registration of births and encouraged school attendance for girls. However, it should be noted that the other forms of child sexual exploitation have not been targeted and that geographical coverage is not national.

In Burkina Faso, religious leaders and senior police personnel have been heavily involved in the fight against FGM.

Village committees to combat sexual violence, trafficking and the worst forms of child labour have been set up in Côte d'Ivoire. As part of the combat against trafficking, many countries in the region have established village committees.

Involvement of children

In order to prevent sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against children at school, preventative measures that involve children have been introduced:

- Peer mediation (Guinea)
- Peer educators (Togo)
- Observatories on violence
- Children's government (Guinea)
- Life skills clubs to deal with HIV/AIDS (Sierra Leone)
- Student committees (Togo)
- Child-to-child information, education and communication activities (Benin)
- Children's governments within schools (Mali)

In the Gambia, the strategic framework for combating HIV/AIDS 2003-2008 includes a national school-based and community peer education and life skills programme. The objective is to sensitize 100 percent of youth aged between 15 and 24 by 2008.

Adoption of codes of conduct

Six countries (Cameroon, the Gambia, Ghana, Niger and Senegal) have adopted a code of conduct for teaching and administrative staff in schools that explicitly prohibits sexual abuse, exploitation and violence.

With the goal of preventing sexual abuse and exploitation of children in international organizations, Save the Children UK, in collaboration with ECPAT International and UNICEF, has developed a training kit on the security of children in organizations.

Special attention is given to how aid workers from humanitarian agencies and peacekeeping troops respect the guidelines for the protection and response to sexual and gender-based violence against refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons (UNHCR, 2003).

In contrast, the code of conduct for child protection against sexual exploitation in tourism does not appear to have been adopted by countries that are popular tourist destinations.

Support mechanisms for children at risk from sexual exploitation

In countries in the region with high prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS, interventions that target orphans and children at risk from HIV/AIDS have been put in place, in order to protect the children by

- Encouraging their access to school (school grant system) and to healthcare;
- Offering them a safe environment (establishment of hosting structures, placement with foster families, for example);
- Supporting the families or relatives that are looking after them.

Interventions are also carried out by NGOs, often in partnership with government departments and international organizations, in the following areas:

- Encouragement and support for school attendance, especially for girls;
- Encouragement for registering children at birth;
- Support and provision of care for children who are victims of economic exploitation, especially children employed as domestic workers;
- Development of income-generating activities;
- Community-based reintegration programmes for children with a disability.

Furthermore, as part of the fight against poverty, some states have integrated child protection into the national strategy for poverty reduction.

Challenges and constraints

In spite of these many efforts, the results are not conclusive, because

- Sensitization remains fragmentary and often limited; the messages are not always adapted to the target group; and their impact is not measured;
- Traditional behaviour and practices related to child sexual exploitation remain active due to the lack of effective ownership by the social actors;
- Social protection mechanisms for those most at risk are not strongly implemented;
- Social inequalities are still strongly present;
- Children rarely manage to assert their rights;
- Programmes and interventions that target vulnerable children are localized, and cover the whole territory only exceptionally;
- Codes of conduct, ministerial circulars and orders, monitoring mechanisms to ensure protection of children from sexual exploitation are not always respected.

The constraints are related to the approach adopted, the lack of resources, inadequately qualified human resources and the absence of coordination between the various stakeholders.

SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

Detection, assistance, rehabilitation/reintegration and monitoring of children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation

There are a series of steps in the provision of aid to child victims: early detection, provision of medical, psychosocial and legal assistance, reintegration and monitoring:

- Detection relies on the existence of mechanisms that allow victims to report the offence and to gain rapid access to assistance. Detection can be through several means: free telephone number, counselling structures or units, and reporting to the police. It goes without saying that these mechanisms should guarantee confidentiality and the protection of the child;
- Holistic care provision for victims, composed of several elements: the medical together with the psychosocial, completed by the legal/judicial, associated with rehabilitation and reintegration activities, involving victims' families;
- Monitoring the children throughout the provision of assistance and their rehabilitation and reintegration, by developing and implementing a personalized life project based on the children's effective participation.

This presupposes the existence of a chain of all the actors that intervene in the provision of assistance to child victims, with the shared goal of guaranteeing protection and the higher good of the child.

Numerous interventions

Early detection, medical, psychosocial and legal assistance are essential elements in the reestablishment of children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

In the countries in the region, there are numerous structures that host, counsel and/or treat victims of sexual exploitation. The great majority of these host structures are represented by faith-based structures, local associations or NGOs, very often supported by development partners. The absence of any centralized information system means it is impossible to evaluate the impact of interventions.

In Benin, the Child Protection Unit is equipped with a free telephone number service and a transit centre for child victims of trafficking. Many associations whose activities are not centred on children victims of sexual exploitation still welcome them and provide assistance (Terre des Hommes and Soeurs Salésiennes, for example).

In Cape Verde, SOS Criança offers a 24-hour, free service for children who are victims of violence. Child Emergency Centres, open 24/7, provide short-term assistance to children who are victims of sexual abuse and exploitation or mistreatment, or who have been abandoned.

In Ghana, the police service's Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit operates in ten regions and works closely with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the International Federation of Women Lawyers and the courts in order to i) investigate cases of violence against women and children; and ii) provide free medical and psychosocial support to victims. In 2006, the unit handled more than 1 500 cases of sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

In Mauritania, the ALWAFI centre, managed by an association, offers free medical and psychosocial aid to children and their families.

In Niger, 13 educational, prevention and legal services provide counselling and hosting of children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. The NGO AFTEN provides assistance for child domestic workers who are victims of sexual abuse to present their cases at juvenile tribunals.

In Senegal, the Observatory of the Dakar Centre for Child and Family Guidance provides care for children from the region of Saint Louis who are victims of sexual exploitation.

In Togo, there are many examples of interventions: free telephone number; seven counselling centres for children victims of violence; and medical, psychosocial and legal assistance provided by the Centre for Psychosocial and Legal Aid within the Tokoin university hospital in Lome. The NGO WAO Afrique also provides psychological and legal assistance to children victims of sexual exploitation.

In order to facilitate social reintegration, the children taken into care by these structures can enjoy a programme of education, apprenticeships, professional training and/or revenue-generating activities.

In order to facilitate family reintegration, further interventions are undertaken with victims' families and communities.

As part of care provision in cases of gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, numerous interventions have been applied:

- Côte d'Ivoire: free telephone number, counselling services for victims of sex-specific violence; and social units based within schools;
- Congo: networks of counselling services (Mouvement pour la Vie and Trauma-Counselling Networks, for example); free medical and psychosocial assistance based within Talagai and Makélékélé hospitals in Bétou and in the Pool;
- Democratic Republic of the Congo: networks of NGOs for detection, care and assistance for children victims of sexual violence; free telephone number, legal clinics, care centres with free medical and psychosocial aid for children victims of sexual exploitation (Saint Joseph, Kitumayni, Bomoto, Nganda); surgical treatment of fistulas (Heal Africa in Goma, Panzi in Bukavu, and IMCK in Kananga);
- Sierra Leone: 21 "Rainbow Centres" provide free assistance and medical, psychosocial and legal support for women and children victims of sexual exploitation.

Capacity-building programmes

Numerous training courses have been given to actors who intervene in cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation. These courses cover the approaches, techniques, preparation and management of projects, care provision procedures for special categories of children (children victims of trafficking, child orphans due to HIV/AIDS and children in conflict with the law), and the sex-specific nature of some acts of violence.

Challenges and constraints

Despite the many interventions cited above, country reports indicate numerous constraints in terms of detection, care provision and monitoring of children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation:

- To compensate for ministerial shortfalls, many associations and NGOs have developed programmes and structures; however, their activities are geographically limited and their capacities for care provision and monitoring are low;
- Limited number of spaces, centres and specialized programmes for hosting, counselling, providing medical, psychosocial and legal aid, rehabilitation and monitoring of children victims of sexual exploitation;
- Insufficient capacity of existing structures;

- No monitoring or supervision by the line ministry;
- No regulations concerning state and association institutions working with children;
- No standardized measures of care provision for children;
- Lack of a specialized approach regarding the specific issue of child sexual exploitation;
- Lack of qualified human resources;
- Low financial resources limit the capacities of intervention and raise question of viability and durability of actions;
- Low participation of children within structures;
- No support mechanisms for children who are victims of violence within structures;
- Insufficient alternatives to rehabilitation;
- Difficulty in mobilizing funds and partners;
- Difficulties in getting reliable data because of the absence of a centralized system for collecting and processing information;
- Unreliable child monitoring mechanisms;
- No means of measuring the impact of programmes on the changing situation of children.

Regarding lessons learned when dealing with gender-based violence, two reports were published in 2008: one by Save the Children UK (2008b); and the other by UNICEF (2008). It appears that, in spite of sensitization programmes, training actors, advocacy to ensure application of the law, global care services, rehabilitation of victims and numerous partnerships developed, improvements should be envisaged concerning

- Identification of victims, which should be prepared for the simultaneous set up of a minimal service of assistance, given the traumatic psychological and social consequences of reporting rape;
- The system for receiving data;
- The holistic approach to providing medical, psychosocial and legal assistance;
- Systematic cooperation between the competent NGOs and other UN agencies;
- Make the contact details of emergency health structures available to all those involved in the chain of psychosocial support for under-age children;
- Involvement of parents or friends in psychosocial support for under-age children;
- Development of income-generating activities that aid the resilience of victims;
- Support for victims who prefer to resort to traditional mechanisms for settling cases;
- Sensitization that should take into account the target group and key messages;
- NGO accreditation by the appropriate ministry;
- Consultative planning in strengthening skills.

There are also specific constraints relating to the intersectoral and multisectoral dimensions of child protection, which are not addressed by clear and effective mechanisms for cooperation between ministries and partners, and between NGOs.

CHILD PARTICIPATION

Greater child participation

Greater child participation in promoting rights of the child is evident in the region. For example, most countries in the region have a children's parliament, children's committees and children's clubs. In addition, several awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns have used children to deliver messages.

There is also a trend of child participation becoming generalized in schools and in the media, and children's forums have been established. The African Movement of Children and Young Workers (MAEJT) is a good example of this dynamic participation of children. MAEJT is present in 126 towns in 21 countries of West, Central, East and Southern Africa. It is essentially composed of children and young workers, and its mission is to promote and implement its 12 rights for children in difficulty.

This movement plays an important role in preventing sexual abuse and exploitation of children domestic workers and child trafficking for economic and/or sexual purposes.

In the Gambia, the NGO Child Protection Alliance (CPA) has created within its organization a group composed of children, called “Voice of the Young”. The group is regularly consulted and involved in all decision-making processes in the organization, and its president sits on the board of CPA.

“Voice of the Young” is very active in mobilizing people and strengthening skills of children and youth. Twenty-four youth clubs have been created in rural schools. Among other activities, the group organizes talk shows on the radio and television about the rights and the protection of children, as well as quarterly national meetings (*bantabas*) involving youth. During these meetings, the youth discuss issues that concern them and produce a final declaration that is submitted to the government for consideration.

Challenges and constraints

Despite greater visibility of the participation of children, certain constraints are apparent in the way children participate:

- Status; the representative nature of children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation; the function of the numerous regional and local committees; the available resources; sustained training and assistance for children participating in the children’s parliament;
- Respect and consideration for children’s opinions in care provision structures for children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation;
- The participatory process involving children: participation of children is often sporadic, poorly understood and badly prepared. Yet the participatory process for children requires the adoption of a specific methodological approach based on ethics and the rights of the child, and organizational commitment and investment over the long term. The goal of children’s participation is to strengthen children’s skills and to equip them with the tools they need to become, and be considered as, fully fledged actors.

When considering the participation of children, one has to ask, how is it possible that, despite children’s participation being order of the day for more than 15 years, the benefits for children are so limited? For example, children do not have easy access to relevant information, to accusation procedures that ensure their protection; children’s associations and spaces for children to express themselves are few and far between; and their opinions are not regularly taken into account. This means that children do not enjoy fully their civil rights, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 12 to 17): the respect of opinions, liberty of expression, freedom of association and access to information.

COOPERATION/COORDINATION

Intersectoral cooperation

The intersectoral and multisectoral dimension of child protection requires the efficient cooperation among all stakeholders, with appropriate coordination mechanisms.

To this end, the large majority of countries in the region, in accordance with their commitments, have appointed a ministry to act as focal point in charge of coordinating the implementation and monitoring of the national action plans for the prevention and fight against all forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Coordination units have been established in some countries: the National Unit for Monitoring and Coordinating Child Protection in Benin; the Child Protection Committee in Sierra Leone; and the Committee for Intersectoral Coordination in Guinea.

There are many partnerships that link up NGOs with government departments. NGOs and journalists have formed networks.

Regional cooperation

In order to ensure monitoring of bilateral and multilateral agreements on the fight against trafficking in children, various commissions have been established: bilateral commissions and regional commissions (the Permanent Regional Monitoring Commission for countries in West Africa, the Permanent Regional Coordination and Monitoring Commission for countries in West and Central Africa).

International cooperation (bilateral and multilateral)

International and bilateral cooperation is very active in child protection in the region. This cooperation targets not only NGOs but also government departments, and is expressed in programming over several years.

In Benin, as part of the development and implementation of child protection policy, a consultation and coordination framework has been put in place.

Challenges and constraints

Establishing mechanisms to oversee intersectoral and multisectoral cooperation constitutes a real challenge for all countries in the region. The development of a global and integrated system of child protection against all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation is totally dependent on the quality of the cooperation.

All countries in the region have to deal with constraints related to intersectoral cooperation:

- Conflict in roles among various stakeholders;
- Absence of procedures clarifying the roles and missions of each actor;
- Little or nothing known about procedures;
- No measures of assistance regarding procedures;
- Multiplication of structures (commissions, committees and units) creating overlapping; some members sit on several commissions;
- Dilution of responsibilities;
- Lack of permanent technical skills and financial resources within coordination units;
- Insufficient collaboration and consultation among development partners (agencies, international organizations and donors);
- No rationalization of resources;
- Minimal building on practices and experiences;
- Hidden competition between structures and partners.

Not all the networks are functional. Partnerships do not undergo regular evaluation and are often based on short-term planning, which has considerable impact on the quality and durability of the programmes that have been set up.

CONCLUSION

Better understanding of sexual abuse and exploitation of children

Since the Rabat Arab-African Forum (2004), West and Central African countries have carried out over a hundred studies and analyses concerning sexual abuse and exploitation of children. This research has improved understanding of how abuse and exploitation can occur, as well as the determining factors and developing trends.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children in all its forms appears to be intensifying. There are many links between trafficking for sexual purposes, child prostitution, sexual tourism and child pornography. Trafficking in children for economic reasons coexists with trafficking in children for sexual purposes. The development of sexual tourism leads almost inevitably to the development of child prostitution and child pornography. Regions that are popular for sexual tourism are also very often favourite destinations for trafficking, both internally and externally, in children for sexual purposes in order to meet the sexual demands of tourists.

Sexual abuse and exploitation in conflict and post-conflict zones has undergone a change: most perpetrators are civilians known to their victims.

Sexual abuse, exploitation and violence in schools remain a concern.

Girl domestic workers are often victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Sexual abuse and exploitation has a significant negative impact on the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The rate of early and/or forced marriages remains still relatively high in many countries in the region.

Sexual abuse and exploitation of children is a gender issue because girls are most affected. However, there are recorded cases of boys being victims of sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation (especially sexual tourism).

In contrast, little information is available on sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against children within their family, children living in the street and Islamic students (*talibés*), children in institutions, children in conflict with the law and children living with a disability.

The real scale of all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation of children remains difficult to determine. There is a low rate of reporting and accusations because victims fear reprisals and stigmatization. Settling cases informally or by traditional law is commonplace.

Furthermore, the absence of centralized information and monitoring-evaluation systems makes it impossible to have a realistic idea of the scale of the different forms of sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

There are multiple, inter-correlated determining factors in the occurrence of sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Certain social norms promote the persistence of particular forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation. Endemic poverty leads to worsening living conditions for children and makes them more vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is both a cause and consequence of sexual exploitation of children. Humanitarian crises due to conflicts or natural disasters cause insecurity and large-scale population displacements, and increase children's vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation. The globalization of the sex industry has a strong impact on all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Networks of traffickers and pimps are becoming increasingly well organized, changing destination depending on measures introduced in certain countries in the region.

Responses to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation: much has been done but results are mixed

In the majority of countries in the region, much effort has gone into developing NAPs, but their implementation is very often partial or incomplete. This is due to weak institutional capacities and insufficient human and financial resources allocated. In addition, some countries have still not prepared a NAP (Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Togo).

Many legislative reforms have been introduced or are underway, with the goal of harmonizing national laws with ratified international instruments. Nevertheless, gaps in the law remain in some countries.

Effective application of the law is a significant challenge in all countries of the region. The number of cases brought to court remains low, and offenders continue to benefit from total impunity. There are many reasons for this: problems of access; weak judicial systems; lack of an institutionalized system for accusations; settling cases informally; cultural resistance; ignorance of the law; and a reluctance of families to deal with legal issues.

Numerous awareness-raising campaigns and activities have been carried out, but their impact has not been measured. Much effort has gone into mobilizing community involvement in order to gain a strong commitment to preventing and combating sexual abuse and exploitation of children. A strongly committed media ensures the transmission of information and sensitization of the general public.

However, traditional practices and behaviour related to child sexual exploitation still persist. Social inequalities and poverty continue to deteriorate living conditions of families and children, forcing them to adopt survival strategies that make them more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

The institutional capacities in care provision, rehabilitation and monitoring of children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation are still weak. There are many reasons for this: lack of a specialized approach regarding the specific issue of child sexual exploitation; lack of qualified human resources; low financial resources; interventions geographically limited; insufficient alternatives to rehabilitation, little or no monitoring of children; and weaknesses in the systems of collecting and processing data.

The participation of children is more visible, due to the children's parliament, youth forums and children's associations, etc. The participation and consideration for the opinions of children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation are nevertheless weak and sporadic. The participatory process approach involving children has not yet been assimilated by all actors.

There are also specific constraints relating to the intersectoral and multisectoral dimension of child protection, which are not addressed by clear and effective mechanisms for cooperation between ministries and partners, and between NGOs. Establishing mechanisms to oversee intersectoral and multisectoral cooperation constitutes a real challenge for all countries in the region. The development of a global and integrated system of child protection against all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation is totally dependent on the quality of the cooperation.

Four years after the Arab-African Forum, and seven years since the Yokohama Congress, there are still no information systems at the national and regional levels. It is the same problem with monitoring mechanisms and measuring impact of the interventions against child sexual exploitation. Data on the scale of the problem and details of the children taken into care are almost non-existent. As a result, it is difficult to evaluate progress and to ensure appropriate targeting for interventions.

In conclusion, we can say that, although numerous actions and programmes have been set up to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, to date there is no real integrated and coordinated system of child protection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

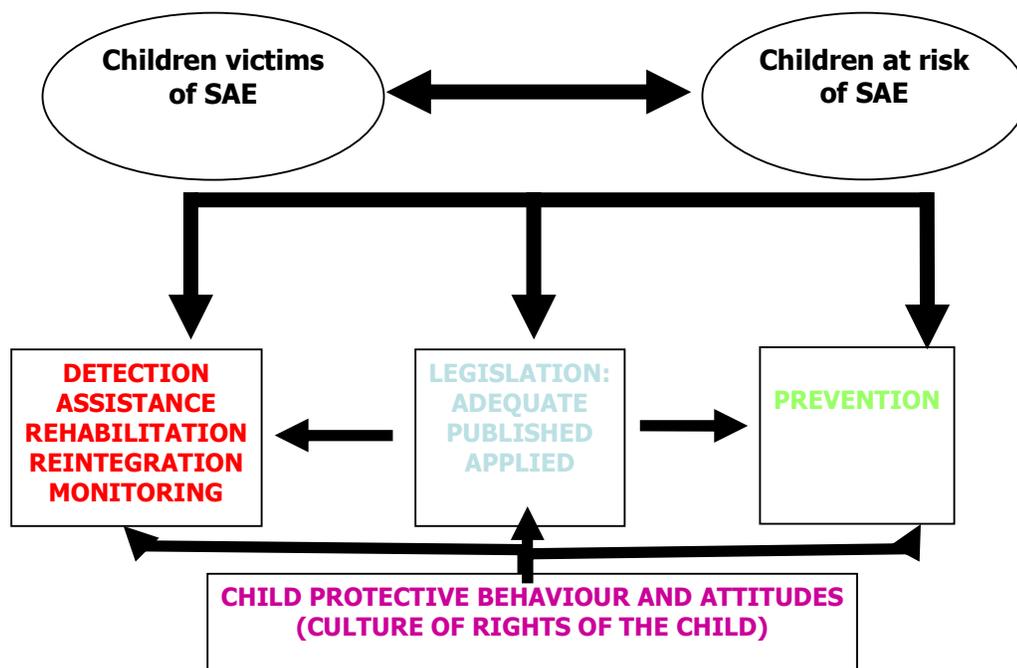
CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

The prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation depends on the presence of a truly global, integrated system of protection. Such a system includes several inter-related sections:

- prevention;
- legislation;
- detection, assistance, rehabilitation and monitoring of child victims;
- promotion of social norms that protect children.

FIGURE 3

Child protection



Establishing this kind of child protection system depends on an inter- and multisectoral approach that addresses the guidelines of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: the best interests of the child; the child's right to life, survival and development; non-discrimination; and the child's participation.

This system of protection engages all stakeholders, divided into two categories:

- the rights holders, in this case, children;
- those responsible for the rights: states, local authorities, families and communities, NGOs and associations, local actors, academics/researchers, development partners and children themselves.

The existence of a global, integrated system would compensate for inadequacies noted in countries in the region, by creating a chain linking up all the actors involved in child protection. The anticipated objectives would be

- A realistic understanding of the situation of child sexual abuse and exploitation;
- -An institutional framework that is functional, coordinated, organized and equipped to implement and monitor action plans;
- Legislation that is harmonized with international commitments that have been adopted, disseminated, familiarized and applied;
- Actors involved with children appropriately trained and equipped;
- A standardized, reliable information system, with a clear flow of information;
- A strengthened association sector and more functional networks;
- Functional monitoring and evaluation mechanisms;
- Children, families, communities and public opinion sensitized, informed and involved in the protection of children against all forms of sexual abuse;
- Child victims detected, assisted, rehabilitated and monitored;
- Wider and more effective access to information, participation and involvement of children;
- Establishment of inter- and multisectoral mechanisms for cooperation at the national, regional and international levels.

The national action plan to combat child sexual exploitation should reflect this approach and aim to implement a global, integrated system of child protection against all forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Each of the sections of this protection system should form a strategic objective that will serve to support the national action plans.

STRATEGIC LINES OF ACTION

Improve understanding of child sexual abuse and exploitation

The implementation of a reliable information system and a monitoring-evaluation mechanism for children's development is a priority for all countries in the region.

In order to set up a reliable, centralized information system that holds reliable qualitative and quantitative data on developments in all forms of child sexual abuse and on the level of quality of the child protection, it is first recommended to have

- A centralized archive system of all the activities, reports, surveys and studies that have been carried out recently on the different forms of child vulnerability;
- An up-to-date overview of activities and programmes;
- An up-to-date list of all actors;
- Strengthened existing authorities (Observatories);
- Operational and generalized databases, which have been recently developed in some countries;
- All actors trained in the collection and processing of data;
- State and association structures that do not yet have an information system equipped with the tools and the means to collect and process data;
- An agreed definition of the frame of reference describing the national system of information: type, content, origin, frequency, terms, flow, etc.

The establishment of a system of monitoring and evaluation that can measure progress and improved targeting for interventions depends on

- A review of practices in order to identify good practices and circulate them;
- The systematic preparation of annual reports in all ministerial departments and NGOs;
- Training actors in reporting cases of abuse.

Adoption, publication and effective application of legislation criminalizing child sexual exploitation and protecting child victims

In order to harmonize national legislation with ratified international conventions and instruments, and to monitor its strict application, it is recommended to

- Finalize reforms that have been initiated;
- Address gaps in the law;
- Strengthen and structure activities related to awareness raising, information on the rights of the child and recently adopted national legislation;
- Equip institutions with the necessary material and competent human resources.

This concerns

- *initiating or finalizing the process of harmonization* of national legislation with ratified international instruments by establishing a plan to advocate for accelerated revision of the law, the adoption of initiated reforms and the promulgation of the new law;
- *monitoring the effective application of child protection laws by*
 - Developing a permanent training plan for magistrates, judges, police officers and lawyers: introduction to the components related to the rights of the child, and to the new laws;
 - Preparing a guide for legal procedures for all actors involved with children;
 - Placing police and judicial services throughout the national territory;
 - Equipping existing youth tribunals and magistrate's courts with trained judges, social workers, functional infrastructures and material and financial resources;
 - Initiating judicial procedure promptly;
 - Systematically providing free legal aid;

- Systematically lifting medical confidentiality in cases of violence against children;
- Introducing mechanisms to monitor video clubs, bars and hotels;
- Facilitating reporting and accusation procedures and guaranteeing the confidentiality and protection of the child;
- Establishing systematic compensation for harm caused to the victim.

This line of action aims to strengthen and structure actions already undertaken in the area of sensitization and community mobilization in order to

- Combat certain persistent perceptions and behaviours that are harmful to children: FGM, informal adoption, early and/or forced marriage, corporal punishment, child murder, etc.;
- Educate populations about the laws and rights concerning child protection;
- Give priority to seeking formal judicial redress in cases of violations of children's rights.

Prevention

Prevention is essential because it functions prior to the determining factors in child sexual abuse and exploitation. It is understood, however, that prevention requires a specific approach that is shaped by the determining factors of certain forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Community mobilization to assimilate social norms for child protection

The issue of child protection and children's rights with regard to sexual abuse and exploitation is fundamentally connected to social norms and their development. There are multiple norms, and they are in a state of constant change.

To ensure that all actors buy into the child protection norms, it is necessary to develop a **participatory and non-prescriptive approach** in order to build dialogues, exchanges and mutual learning opportunities with local actors. This intersectoral cooperation (social and institutional) will allow social actors to assimilate and assume responsibility for the issues and values of child protection, and, in the medium to long term, will lead to

- a change in or complete abandonment of certain harmful practices; and simultaneously,
- the promotion and strengthening of other social norms that protect children.

In order to achieve this, it is recommended to develop and implement an Information Education Communication plan, through a participatory approach, that includes a Communication for Behavioural Change strategy. The content, terms, means and the indicators to measure impact of this plan should be developed with all actors from state offices and associations in partnership with the media, in particular local radio. The goal will be to

- promote behaviour and attitudes based on respect for children's rights;
- combat persistent harmful traditional practices;
- educate populations in a clear and understandable manner about children's rights and national laws concerning protection;
- publicize available resources for protection (helpline, counselling centres, etc.);
- strengthen capacities of families and communities with respect to protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation;
- teach children how to protect themselves and defend their rights (peer sensitization/information);
- encourage reporting cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation;
- involve traditional and spiritual leaders, who will act as intermediaries with their communities;
- monitor ethical treatment by the media in reporting case of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Communications, and their vectors, should be adapted to the target population. This plan will be monitored and evaluated in order to measure its impact, to reorient its approach or to consolidate it.

Prevention in vulnerable communities

In order to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation of vulnerable children, it is recommended to ensure that

- all children, without discrimination, have free access to basic social services, especially registration of civil status, education, apprenticeship, training and healthcare. Particular attention should be paid to girls, children from poor families or living in the poorest areas, children with a disability, children without family, orphans due to HIV/AIDS, street children, child workers and refugee and/or displaced children;
- families and poor communities have access to income-generating activities, health insurance, community development programmes and literacy programmes.

In order to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation in school, it is recommended to

- strengthen the existing mechanisms in certain countries;
- set up mechanisms in those countries without;
- educate and sensitize children, parents and teachers concerning child sexual abuse and exploitation;
- involve parent associations and the students themselves;
- ensure effective sanctions for teachers.

To prevent sexual abuse and exploitation in refugee/displaced persons camps, it is recommended to ensure the strict application of and training of personnel in the *Guidelines for prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence against refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons* (UNHCR, 2003).

Special attention should be paid to HIV/AIDS prevention programmes, especially among children victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

Involvement of the tourism sector, police and customs officers

In order to address the demand, it is recommended to sensitize, involve and mobilize the various sectors that have a link with commercial exploitation of children: hotels, leisure and transport services.

Lobbying should be pursued in this manner, with the goal of adopting a code of conduct for the protection of children against sexual exploitation in the tourism and travel industry.

Police, immigration and customs officers must make a special effort to stop traffickers.

Improve assistance, rehabilitation and monitoring of child victims

Improve the help mechanisms that ensure the protection of children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation

Child victims should be able to access help easily from wherever they are (helpline, counselling services, etc.).

A directory of all the existing assistance providers should be developed in a child-friendly way and made available to children.

Strengthen the capacities of institutions responsible for children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation

In order to be prepared for shortcomings and to strengthen state and association institutions involved in providing assistance to children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, it is recommended to

- Equip existing structures with the necessary material and human resources;
- Create new structures to provide wider geographical coverage;
- Establish a plan to strengthen the skills of state actors and actors from associations. The plan will build on lessons learned (training given and tools developed), to identify specific training needs and to develop training that is adapted to the profile of the actor involved, and above all, to measure the impact;
- Develop an exchange of good practices;
- Carry out regular evaluations of the training provided in order to readjust and consolidate the training plan.

Introduce supervisory and monitoring mechanism of structures by

- Defining standardized norms for assistance to children in reception centres;

- Informing and training all actors concerned in these norms;
- Institutionalizing the monitoring and supervision of Koranic schools and their students (*talibés*);
- Ensuring rigorous and periodic monitoring of the quality of child protection.

Rehabilitation/reintegration and monitoring of children

In order to compensate for the difficulties encountered with family rehabilitation, social reintegration and child monitoring, it is recommended to

- strengthen the process of family rehabilitation through parental assistance and involvement, as well as making the parents assume responsibility;
- develop viable alternatives in terms of rehabilitation, adapted to each child (personalized life project);
- ensure rigorous and regular monitoring of the child returned to his or her family, in order to avoid relapses and to consolidate the child's life project.

Guarantee civil rights and strengthen participation of children

In order to consolidate and generalize the participation of children, it is recommended to guarantee access to civil rights for all children, without discrimination, which means strengthening

- Ease of access to information;
- Ease of access to complaint and reporting mechanisms;
- Creation of children's associations and places for children to express themselves;
- Representation of children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation and of vulnerable children within children's parliaments, associations and clubs; provision of necessary resources for these structures;
- Consideration given to children's opinions in all actions/programmes and policies that target them: sensitization, information, programmes, strategies and policies;
- Training in the participatory approach of actors involved with children.

Strengthening cooperation

The integrated system of child protection depends on several stakeholders. Implementation is therefore completely dependent on the quality of cooperation among all the actors, which recalls the importance of establishing institutional mechanisms for coordination and monitoring-evaluation.

This inter- and multisectoral cooperation should be guided by a framework clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each person involved, and coordination procedures that are clear and understood by all parties.

To compensate for the inherent difficulties in inter- and multisectoral cooperation, it is recommended to

- Officially designate the ministry focal point in charge of coordinating the implementation and monitoring of national action plans for the protection of children from sexual abuse and exploitation;
- Establish or strengthen the coordination unit, which will be supervised by the ministry focal point;
- Equip the coordination unit with the resources and technical skills that are needed;
- Establish coordination procedures that are applicable to all stakeholders;
- Strengthen, formalize and register the durability of state-NGO partnerships;
- Establish a consultative and coordination framework between donor agencies and development partners;
- Strengthen association networks;
- Strengthen regional cooperation mechanisms
- Ensure rigorous monitoring of implementation by using monitoring-evaluation plans that measure the quality and impact of responses;
- Introduce mechanisms for reporting back ...

Particular attention should be given to cooperation between the police, courts and customs authorities, not only in the countries in the region but also with other countries, in order to combat increasingly organized networks and to improve the application of the principle of extraterritoriality.

Conclusion

It is clear that the protection of children from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation depends above all on the effective commitment of the State. The degree of interest by public authorities in child protection, their realization of the scale of the problem and their determination to protect all children without distinction are of vital importance.

Indeed, establishing a realistic child protection system is dependent on particular constraints and risks related to

- the commitment of all the actors and partners concerned in achieving the anticipated results;
- synchronizing the different components of a response;
- the institutional capacity of the ministry responsible for coordinating implementation and monitoring and evaluation;
- interministerial coordination with respect to priority goals;
- the time frames for introducing legislative and institutional measures that have been identified;
- the availability of required human resources;
- the allocated budget and the timing of its disbursement.

The national action plan is not simply a list of activities and programmes supported by various actors, but should correspond to the implementation of this system of protection.

Implementing such a system of protection is above all a process that is based on

- a complete adoption of the policy by all actors, not only in terms of content but also its principles and approaches;
- a programme that requires measurable results in terms of implementation of child rights interventions. The programme should ensure a rationalized and optimized use of resources; and
- clarifying responsibilities of those in authority over children.

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