

# ADOLESCENT PROGRAMMING EXPERIENCES DURING CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT



# **Adolescent programming experiences during conflict and post-conflict**

CASE STUDIES

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
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COVER PHOTO: UNICEF - OPT/2003/STEVE SABELLA  
A Pyalara/UNICEF sponsored programme with the objective  
of enhancing self confidence, self expression, cooperation,  
leadership and skill. Beit Duko West bank, August 2003.

ADVANCE COPY

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## Introduction

The case studies presented here are examples of programming that encourages adolescent participation in community development and peace-building during crisis. In each of the country situations, obstacles have been transformed into opportunities. Collectively, the case studies offer a wealth of information and new ideas. They tell the story of sustainable success, showing how participation can contribute to the fulfilment of a rights-based agenda and suggesting ways to provide a framework for young people to create better, more peaceful societies. They are also intended to raise questions and begin to address the gap in guidance on adolescent participation in programme activities during situations of conflict and post-conflict.

The case studies are the result of a collaborative effort between key UNICEF Country and Regional Offices, Programme Division, the Office of Emergency Programmes in UNICEF and the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children also provided significant input.

A broad range of issues has been addressed, including strategic consideration of UNICEF medium-term strategic

plan (MTSP) priorities in the context of emergencies. Among the programmes selected as 'good practices' are young people's involvement in media and advocacy; HIV/AIDS awareness; community peace-building; peer-to-peer psychosocial support; truth and justice-seeking in post-conflict reconstruction; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; sports, education and vocational training; and research on the impact of war on children. In each of the case studies, the participatory component is highlighted, demonstrating how participation enhances the protection of children and adolescents and contributes to the success of UNICEF's approach to human rights-based and results-based programming.

### **THE ISSUE: WHAT IS PARTICIPATION?**

In the context of these case studies, 'participation' is understood in a programmatic sense, involving young people as active participants in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of sustainable, community-based initiatives. During a humanitarian crisis, when the social and political context is likely to be threatened or destroyed, innovative

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In this study, the documentation of adolescent participation in programme planning and implementation during humanitarian emergencies has been analysed within the broader framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This brings into focus two key points, as articulated in the Convention:

### **(1) Children's right to participation**

- States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (article 12(1));
- The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice (article 13(1));
- States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child (article 14(1)(2));

*continued on page 5*

strategies are needed to guide and support adolescents in contributing to community life. Girls are especially vulnerable to targeted violence during conflict situations, and their specific needs must be a priority during any humanitarian response.

It is also important to consider, in a particular context, the most appropriate way for adolescents to become involved. In some cases, young people may themselves come up with an idea and, with support and guidance, initiate community action. For example, the peer-to-peer counselling project in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) was planned and implemented by adolescents from the onset. In the case of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of child soldiers in Sierra Leone, opportunities for participation were limited by the constraints of the military exercise. However, during the reintegration and reconciliation phase of the DDR programme, adolescents were able to participate in school and community activities.

Another example is the case study on participation of children and adolescents in the work of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The role of children was, to a certain extent, determined by the official nature of the Commission's work. However, children were able to play an effective and even an essential role in the process. In all these examples, the participation of adolescents has been successful within a wide range of conditions and contexts.

One essential element, in order for participation to succeed, is recognition of young people's ability to contribute to family, school and community life. The positive role that adolescents can play needs to be reinforced, with the understanding that they are not part

of the problem, but part of the solution. However, the responsibility for solving the problems of society – especially during conflict – must not be placed on their shoulders. Rather, adolescents should be supported in contributing in appropriate ways to achieve realistic goals.

Considerable work has been done in recent years to advance programme knowledge in participation and in protection for children and adolescents, but there is a need to consider more carefully how these intersect. The need is urgent. Unless adolescents caught in conflict are provided with positive alternatives, their hopes will be shattered and they will be more likely to perpetuate the cycle of violence. If opportunities are provided, adolescents' energy and resilience can become a source of strength for them, their families and their communities. Providing opportunities for adolescent participation in community development and peace-building is therefore one of the most effective ways to build the foundation for a more just and peaceful society.

But adolescent participation is not a quick fix. It requires long-term commitment to develop the capacities of young people to achieve realistic goals. By examining good practices underway in a number of unstable situations, we can begin to map the way forward, finding entry points for sustainable solutions. The successes in specific country contexts may be adapted to serve as the basis for more effective programming to support the development and protection of adolescents in emergencies.

### **Adolescents caught in conflict: the approach**

Adolescence is a time to assume new responsibilities and to make decisions

### **(2) Children's right to protection from violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination, including during armed conflict**

- States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child (article 19(1));
- In accordance with their obligations under international law to protect the civilian population in armed conflicts, States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict (article 38 (4)).

These articles of the Convention underline the need to enable and guide the participation of children and adolescents in matters that concern them, while also protecting them from all forms of violence, especially during humanitarian emergencies.

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that will affect lifelong promise and potential. The challenges that young people face – questioning parental authority, coming to terms with newfound sexuality, accepting responsibilities, testing knowledge and abilities, experimenting with social and cultural boundaries – can be overwhelming. In conflict situations, young people must somehow ‘cross over’ from childhood to adulthood while confronting the brutality of war. In a world that is stripped of safety and security, where families are separated, parents threatened, homes destroyed, schools attacked and community leaders suddenly powerless to protect the vulnerable from harm, young people need support and guidance. They need to know whom to trust and how they can contribute in positive ways to their family, school and community life.

Too often there is nowhere to turn. In the midst of conflict, humanitarian assistance has typically focused on meeting the survival needs of young children, while adolescents are overlooked. Only recently have adolescent issues been brought to the forefront during humanitarian crises, and this has been largely the result of a problem-based approach to programming. For example, in the face of an HIV/AIDS epidemic it is now standard programming practice to address adolescent health issues and engage adolescents in efforts to prevent the spread of infection. When it comes to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), it is understood that separate DDR programmes are needed for children and adolescents who have been recruited and used in hostilities, with specific attention to girls. And some efforts have been made to protect all children in conflict situations from sexual violence, abuse and exploitation. But those measures,

in response to visible problems, do not address the underlying causes that leave adolescents exposed to violence and exploitation in the first place.

The preferred approach for addressing the unmet needs of adolescents is a human rights-based approach to programming. Instead of addressing specific problems within a limited context, the human rights-based approach seeks to realize adolescent rights within the broader cultural, economic and political context, and to support young people’s engagement in home, school and community life, including during emergencies.

#### **Protecting adolescents at risk**

Adolescents face multiple risks during armed conflict and may be targeted for violence, abuse and exploitation. They are the age group most often recruited by armed forces or groups for use as child soldiers, and they are most likely to be trafficked for exploitative labour or commercial sex. They are the primary target for sexual violence and run a high risk of HIV/AIDS infection. Despite these evident vulnerabilities, the adolescent age group is the least likely to receive assistance or protection during conflict. This is because humanitarian assistance has typically focused on the urgent health and nutrition needs of under-five and primary school-age children.

In recent years this gap has been noted – for example, in *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, the seminal study by Graça Machel – and some efforts have been made to focus greater attention on adolescent development during humanitarian emergencies. However, a much greater effort is needed to close programming gaps in meeting the specific health, vocational and

psychosocial needs of young people in conflict situations.

Another gap in adolescent programming during emergencies is the political dimension of participation. As pointed out in the UNICEF paper, *The Thin Red Line: Youth Participation in Times of Human-made Crisis*, it is important to consider the link between adolescent protection and participation during armed conflict within a political context. Both protection and participation are priorities and the two can be at odds.

During armed conflict, the political awareness of adolescents is likely to be very high. Family ties and loyalties, and association with national struggles for recognition or independence, can create risks. Because of the violence and injustice they face, adolescents may feel compelled to take action. For example, some young people in Colombia were inspired to join the Children’s Peace Movement after witnessing the killing of their friends or parents. Their decision to speak out publicly against the violence led to a national movement and international recognition, but it also left them vulnerable to attack. In a number of instances, members were threatened by rebel groups and local militia. In all cases, it is essential to set clear limits on what is appropriate participation, and to recognize and carefully weigh the aggravated risk that adolescents may face as advocates for peace in a society torn apart by war.

There must also be awareness of the long-term risk of suppressing social and political motivation. Adolescents need a chance to test their ideas, to build confidence and self-esteem, and to find a place in their communities. Without positive opportunities to express their views and contribute to social change, they may become

frustrated and more easily provoked to act in rash ways or incited to join armed groups, or they may resort to other destructive behaviours. If adolescents lose hope in their future, if they feel they have nothing to live for, they are more likely to behave in ways that are harmful to themselves and others.

#### **TAKING ACTION: PARTICIPATION IS A WAY FORWARD**

Participation in home, school and community life is the most effective way to develop the potential of adolescents and increase their protection, especially during times of conflict and crisis. Involving adolescents gives them the opportunity to express themselves and contribute their voice, opinions and ideas to the social dialogue. It also builds self-esteem and helps them find a role for themselves in their communities. The participation of adolescents in community life has an added advantage: It brings their creativity, energy and resourcefulness into the social agenda.

Despite overwhelming odds, adolescents in the midst of war have demonstrated remarkable ability to come up with creative solutions. For example, during the Kosovo crisis in 1999, some 20,000 young Kosovars in six Albanian refugee camps came together and formed Youth Councils. The Youth Councils took action to improve the living conditions in the camps, organized sports and music events, improved safety and cleanliness, distributed landmine-awareness information and provided psychosocial counselling for younger children. On repatriation, when the young activists returned to their home villages, many continued their community development work, maintaining a network that promotes local peace-

building efforts, including across ethnic lines.

But these and similar efforts during crisis do not come without considerable struggle and growing pains. In order to develop adolescents' capacities and enhance their protection in conflict situations, proper support and guidance are needed, as well as opportunities for meaningful participation in the long term.

This raises the question of what exactly is meant by 'meaningful adolescent participation'. The 'ladder of participation', popularized by Roger Hart, has become a benchmark for determining the extent to which, in a given situation, young people are able to exercise decision-making power and exert their own influence over the means and the ends of their labour. This ranges from manipulation and tokenism on the bottom rung, to full-fledged youth-designed and implemented programmatic responses on the top.

The 'ladder of participation' was conceived within the context of a developmental framework, but during conflict situations the entire notion of participation shifts, like a community compass gone awry. Planning for the future has no meaning for a young person who does not expect to live through another day. What was normal and ordinary is suddenly lost in the effort to survive. And once the conditions of the conflict are locked into place – when schools are closed and the possibilities for recreation are obsolete – adolescents are confronted with boredom and frustration. Adolescents struggling to cross the threshold into adulthood are likely to question authority and challenge social and cultural conventions. When society is disrupted by war, and security is threatened, the difficulties are compounded.

The adolescent years are crucial because they are an important developmental phase, when the foundation is laid for purposeful and moral judgments and goals. Under the extreme conditions of war, if adolescents are left without opportunities to envision a better future, youthful optimism may turn into bitter pessimism. Addressing their rights is therefore not negotiable; it is an urgent priority. But when adolescent participation is introduced in emergency programming, care must be taken to set realistic goals. If participation is thwarted by manipulation or false promises, the result may be harmful, increasing frustration and leaving youth further disillusioned. It is therefore essential that the principles – and the limits – of adolescent participation are well understood.

Participation is most effective as a framework for the involvement of young people in activities that shape their world and develop their full potential. It is not just another piece to add to the puzzle. Rather, it is a holistic method of supporting young people's development and protection, as a process building towards community engagement and laying the groundwork for a democratic society. Although more time and additional resources are needed to allow for young people's involvement in programme activity, the results achieved will be more effective. Meaningful participation leads in the long run to a different destination, a place of greater confidence and self-determination. And that adds up to sustainable capacity-building and community development. It means that young people are learning, through experience, to make informed decisions, to develop stable relationships and to take on the responsibilities of democratic citizenship. Participation is, in other words, fundamental to a human rights-based approach to programming.

## IMPACT: WHAT WORKS AND WHY

The programmes documented in this study were chosen as examples specifically because they demonstrate how young people can make a significant difference in their own lives and the lives of others, even and especially during humanitarian emergencies. In some cases, communication skills and media activities are the key concern of the adolescents involved, while in other cases the entry point may be youth clubs, youth-friendly health services, mine awareness, sports competitions or political processes.

Girls and boys have both demonstrated their capacity to initiate and contribute to programmatic development within a wide range of activities and issues. They have been successful in leading political discussions and debates, testifying in truth and reconciliation processes, providing psychosocial support to younger children and raising awareness of HIV/AIDS. Their energy, enthusiasm, resilience and strong desire for justice and peace can be a catalyst for peace-building in their families and communities. This has been well demonstrated, for example, in Angola, Colombia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Timor Leste.

The common objective of the programmes profiled in this study is to support adolescent development and protection by providing opportunities for them to take on meaningful roles in society. The level of risk encountered and the variety of skills and capacities that adolescents have mastered varies from one case study to the next. In all instances, however, a conscious effort was made to create a culture of non-violence through positive and constructive participation in family and community life.

A number of key 'lessons learned' are threaded through the case study analyses:

- A level of trust and openness is necessary to stimulate interaction.
- Participation can take many forms. In all cases, it should provide learning opportunities for adolescents to make decisions, assume leadership roles and initiate action.
- In order to develop sustainable and meaningful participation, it is essential to engage adolescents from the inception of the project.
- Recognize the talents, skills and learning abilities of adolescents, and build on existing capacities and strengths.
- Adolescents need to 'own' the project. Help them assume responsibility for the process and outcomes.
- Adolescent participation as a programming strategy is valid and has both short-term and long-term benefits.
- Integrate traditional knowledge and wisdom and use local resources.
- Each girl and boy is unique and will bring forward specific capacities and talents. Let each individual find their niche, while providing full and equal opportunities to all.
- Specific affirmative action strategies will be needed to overcome ethnic, religious, political or gender discrimination.
- Girls may need additional encouragement and support to overcome social, cultural and economic barriers to their full participation in community life.
- Sustainability is best achieved through involving parents, teachers and community leaders in young people's programming activities.
- Adolescents who are out of school should have access to programmes through youth groups or other community outreach.

In order to facilitate adolescent participation in programme activity during conflict and post-conflict situations, creative and effective entry points need to be identified. For example, in Somalia, where the governmental framework is fragmented, sports and recreation provided an entry point for community development. Adolescents came together through sporting events and then began to expand their activities, creating friendly community spaces and initiating leadership and vocational training.

In the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), the 'We Care' peer-to-peer psychosocial programme has trained university students to provide psychosocial support, mentoring and recreational activities for adolescents in local schools and villages. Evaluation of the project revealed that the adolescents wanted to move beyond psychosocial support. In a later phase, the project has therefore been expanded to include two new components: media activities and public achievement. The media activities component encourages adolescents to come up with ideas to express themselves and includes a youth-run newspaper – *The Youth Times* – as well as a successful weekly TV programme. The public achievement component provides opportunities for youth-led community improvement projects.

Every effort must be made to adapt to changing needs. For example, a key finding of the OPT programme evaluation was that most of the issues of concern to young participants – both boys and girls – were typical of the unmet needs of adolescents everywhere, regardless of the political situation. This was demonstrated through a youth-to-youth 'hotline', set up to address escalating violence during the Second Intifada. The

majority of adolescents who called the hotline were seeking advice on family relationships, first romance, problems at school, peer pressure or school exams, as well as the political crisis.

In some country situations, where community groups are not already established, strategies are needed to create a context for adolescent participation. In Indonesia, sympathetic members of women's organizations representing the opposing factions – both Christian and Muslim – mobilized to create interest in holding child rights workshops. This led to involvement in community activities and the creation of a participatory Maluku Children's Parliament across the Muslim-Christian divide.

Community groups and schools can provide a context for opening the channels of communication and collaboration between adults and adolescents. For example, in Albania, young people were already mobilized through a network of school-based Albanian Youth Clubs. When a partnership between UNICEF and the Albanian National Television network was launched, contacts with young people were made through the local school-based clubs. Young people quickly took the lead, engaging their peers, families and communities. Efforts were made to ensure that girls were fully involved.

In some cases, when communities are displaced and without functioning schools, other strategies may prove effective. In Colombia, the 'Return to Happiness' project has enabled adolescents to provide psychosocial support to younger children through play therapy. The catalyst for Return to Happiness was the Colombia Children's Peace Movement. The movement, which began in 1996, expanded

rapidly, involving local community groups, schools and the Catholic Church. One of the strengths of the Return to Happiness project has been its adaptability. More recently the Colombian refugee communities across the border in Panama have implemented the project through child-friendly spaces inside the camps.

Innovation is also a key strategy in implementing youth participatory programmes. In Angola, local youth-run non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are the impetus for a successful national HIV/AIDS awareness campaign. They have reached out to the community using radio, theatre and public discussions and debates. They are also providing youth-friendly health services. What was once a taboo subject has become an open dialogue, engaging young people, their parents, local and national government officials, the military, police officers and truck drivers – with both girls and boys taking a lead role. The activities, managed by adolescents, are linked to community and government objectives in the fight against HIV/AIDS, which provides a broad base for support and sustainability.

In northern Uganda the Women's Commission found that a number of different strategies were needed to engage young people in participatory research and advocacy on issues related to the impact of conflict on adolescents. The research and advocacy project included teams of young people in Kitgum and Gulu Districts. A local youth NGO – Watwero (We can do it!) – was already well established in Kitgum and served as the youth coordination group there. In Gulu there was no youth organization, and so adults from the community were contacted and served to mentor the young people until gradually a youth group emerged and undertook follow-up project work.

Specific strategies were used to encourage girls' participation.

In Sierra Leone, UNICEF, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and other international and local child rights organizations have worked to involve young people in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), from initial preparation, to background research, to final reporting and follow up. The challenge has been to develop child-friendly procedures to ensure protection: special hearings for children, closed sessions, a safe environment for interviews, protected identity of child witnesses, and staff trained in psychosocial support. The aim of the TRC, in relation to children, is to create an impartial and official record of what happened during the armed conflict and to seek reconciliation among young people and within their communities.

## ENDING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

Child rights advocates and humanitarian workers operating in different countries and contexts can help facilitate the participation of young people as partners in re-establishing a protective environment and rebuilding community life. However, the risks must be fully understood and addressed. Even more than in stable situations, adults who encourage the participation of young people during conflict and post-conflict situations must carefully weigh the possibility that adolescents who advocate social change may face aggravated risks, and make protection a priority at all times.

In all instances, meaningful adolescent participation can promote conflict resolution, tolerance and democratic principles, as well as developing young people's skills in negotiation, problem

solving, critical thinking and communication. Participation can help to build self-esteem, teamwork and social responsibility. In addition, the development of young people's capacity and their involvement in community life provide alternatives to exploitation and violence and thus increases protection. But if child rights advocates and humanitarian workers are to provide safe avenues for adolescent participation, they must be ready to address the issues that will be foremost in young people's minds. It is crucial to be clear, from the onset, what kinds of activities are appropriate and constructive. There must also be long-term commitment to support young people's efforts in

achieving realistic and sustainable solutions.

Adolescents have a wealth of talents and abilities, and possess the determination to improve the conditions of their life at home, in school and in the community. Young people still in their teens are eager to be guided and encouraged to participate in positive ways but, if opportunities do not exist and if they are not able to find an outlet, then their dreams may end in frustration. Much more effort is urgently needed to create opportunities for adolescents' peaceful participation in situations of armed conflict and post-conflict. The capacities of today's generation must not be wasted.

## Youth Broadcasting in Albania: Troç (Straight Talk)

### ISSUE

Albanian children have been greatly affected by the turmoil that has swept their country since the end of Communism in 1991. The collapse of governance and the rejection of the past have created a social vacuum, leaving young people with little to build on. As the country has emerged from years of isolation, the government has prioritized the rebuilding of physical infrastructure. Social issues, including issues of concern to adolescents, have received comparatively little attention. As a result, poverty and inequality have increased. Neighbouring conflicts in the Balkans have further destabilized the country.

Internal and external migration in

search of jobs has led to widespread social problems. Albanian young people have increasingly fallen victim to trafficking, exploitation and crime, partly fuelled by the acute migration pressure. During the transition period, risk behaviours such as drug use and unprotected sex are increasing. HIV/AIDS infection rates are low now, but the epidemic is growing fast and the government is doing little to inform and help young people protect themselves.

The results of a 2001 UNICEF/Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) youth opinion poll revealed that fewer than 1 per cent of young people in Albania believe that politics will have a positive impact on their future. Two thirds expect to

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“It's our voice that will rise over all these problems.”

YOUNG TROÇ REPORTER, ALBANIA

make their future in Western Europe or North America. At the same time, 70 per cent of young people expect that their lives will be better than those of their parents, demonstrating the optimism that can help inform and improve the situation of adolescents.

## ACTION

Troç (Straight Talk) is a one-hour nationwide weekly television programme in Albania produced by adolescents. Troç deals with issues of concern and interest to young people – everything from children in the north kept out of school by fears of revenge killings to the national puppet theatre. The young reporters' stories have covered the Youth Parliament, sports heroes, the use of drugs, family problems and the future of Albania, as they see it. About 45 per cent of the programmes are on young people's issues, 23 per cent each on country issues and cultural heritage, and 10 per cent on talented and distinguished youth.

In a country where 40 per cent of the population is 18 or younger and virtually every household has a television set, TV is a powerful medium for bringing adolescents together. It has proved an effective tool for building bridges between adults and adolescents, so that the latter can play a key role in moving the country forward.

The programme is produced by about 80 adolescents, ages 14 to 17, working in 11 bureaus throughout the country. They 'call the shots' in all aspects, guided by an adult facilitator who helps them realize their vision. On the one hand, they become agents of change, informing the country about social problems and responsibilities from their perspective. On the other hand, they are learning valuable reporting

and production skills that prepare them for professional life and its challenges. The programme also develops their critical thinking skills. By working as journalists they learn to question and analyse, and not to accept things at face value.

## BRINGING ADOLESCENTS TOGETHER

The inspiration for Troç dates back to the summer of 1999, during the Kosovo crisis, when the national Albanian Youth Club, with UNICEF support, joined young Kosovars in the Albanian refugee camps to take positive action. The Youth Club led to a movement of young people in Albania, dedicated to social change.

Later that year UNICEF approached the Albanian National Television network (TVSH), which reaches 98 per cent of the population, looking for ways to involve adolescents in the media. A dialogue was started with Albanian journalists and media people to establish a children's department at TVSH. As a first step, UNICEF provided the station with cameras, lights and a van to support the production of a light-hearted show for younger children. In 2000, with the introduction of the rights-based approach, the programme concept shifted. This involved adolescents in a news programme that allowed them to discuss issues rather than to simply provide entertainment. They began to ask questions and focus attention on issues of concern to children and to adults.

After assessing the station's capacities and needs, UNICEF proposed expansion of the programme and increased access to the airwaves. The staff of the national TV station – founded during the Communist era – was conservative.

Managers could not conceive of giving adolescents so much freedom, including relatively open access to the airwaves. Following considerable discussion and reassurance they decided to run a trial programme. A producer was assigned to the project and, with UNICEF's help and advice, began contacting local schools to identify interested adolescents.

Initially there were 40 participants, ages 14 to 17, from eight districts throughout the country. During their first meetings they watched the news and brainstormed. They asked questions: Why were adolescents and women not represented? Why were the broadcasts boring and overly sophisticated? They decided to do something different.

Training began in December 2000. Participants learned basic skills: how to hold the camera and microphone, how to shoot and conduct an interview and how to tell their story and write the script. They worked closely with TVSH staff and UNICEF. From the start, nearly two thirds of the young people were girls and they participated actively in all phases of the project. After only two months, in February 2001, the first show was broadcast. Once Troç was on the air, the scepticism of TVSH managers was gradually overcome – they were won over by the quality of the show, the spirit of the young people and the excitement of something so completely different from what had been done before.

Two years later, the Troç programme has proved successful and sustainable. Working after school, adolescents in each bureau produce three or four segments a month of about five minutes in length. Unedited footage and a script are shipped to Tirana, where the TVSH producer edits and compiles them into a weekly programme of 45 to 60 minutes. Each programme is

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## Components of the Troç programme

- Around 80 young people work after school in 11 bureaus in every region of the country.
  - Each bureau is managed by a local non-governmental organization (NGO), which hires an adult facilitator to work with the young people.
  - The young people choose story ideas, report, prepare scripts and do voiceovers, sending these elements to the producer for compilation.
  - The national partner is TVSH, Albanian national television.
  - TVSH provides a producer, cameraman and editor as well as a set and two hours of airtime – one hour for the show (18:00 on Saturday), and one for a repeat broadcast (10:00 on Sunday).
  - UNICEF provides equipment, training and technical support.
  - Reporting brings youth into contact with their peers, civil society, school administrators, political leaders, journalists and other professionals.
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comprised of about half a dozen segments, plus studio interviews and other one-off specials. The 'strands' or themes include:

- on and off the tourist map in Albania
- live studio chat with guests
- personal story
- book of the month
- the environment
- free time
- candid camera
- girls and boys – relationships
- school
- youth activities
- news of the week
- world of youth – trends
- opinion
- e-mail and letters

### **BUILDING SKILLS AND OVERCOMING OBSTACLES**

There were numerous issues to be resolved as the Troç programme gained a wider audience. One issue was the profile of the adult facilitators. Initially the idea had been to hire professional broadcast journalists, but UNICEF felt they would have difficulty handing over control of the show to young people. Instead teachers were hired to facilitate, as they were accustomed to letting young people learn by doing.

Another unexpected issue was the resounding success of Troç. Young people suddenly found themselves in the spotlight. As a result of their success, they were provided with the best equipment and given broad support. This created tension among professional counterparts at TVSH who, when their opinions were sought about how to improve the show, were not very forthcoming. Continued efforts were made to engage professionals and to benefit from their advice, fostering a relationship with TVSH that was based on open dialogue.

Ultimately it is the young people who decide what they will cover and how they will cover it. This has allowed them to bring a new perspective to the general public in Albania, reporting on stories the adult media ignore. It has also created controversies and, in some cases, helped to work through social problems. For example, the Tirana bureau reported on terrible conditions in a high school dormitory, and the manager was called to account by his supervisors and eventually fired. A report on the lack of textbooks in Korça brought action by the Ministry of Education – textbooks were provided in time for the young people to study for exams.

But influencing public opinion on sensitive issues can also generate a strong public response. Young people may not understand the risks, and they need guidance. Facilitators were closely involved in the production of each programme to make sure the young reporters didn't provoke public opposition or hostility.

Ongoing training is the key to keeping up the high quality of Troç programmes. In order to build solidarity and hone skills, the young people and facilitators come together once a year for a one-week training. The training focuses on reporting skills, writing and television production, as well as issues such as ethics and human rights. In addition, an adult producer and cameraman travel to each bureau four times a year to help improve the skills of the young reporters.

But adults are learning too. All over the country they are seeing the strength and skills of young people, and learning about the issues that concern them. The quality of Troç and the skills of its journalists are highly respected. In fact, one adult facilitator

secured a job as a reporter at a popular private television station solely on the basis of what he had learned about TV journalism through Troç, and the young reporters are periodically approached to work with local television networks.

### **UNICEF'S ROLE**

UNICEF played a key role in starting up the Troç programme, laying the groundwork and persuading TVSH to adopt the idea. UNICEF also wrote a funding proposal that brought in \$137,000 from the Norwegian Government, and purchased the necessary equipment. In addition, UNICEF facilitated the initial programme co-ordination and training. Specific activities undertaken by UNICEF include:

- introducing the idea to the local media and persuading them that adolescents need media access to address issues that concern them;
- helping TVSH understand how to work in partnership with an international organization;
- bringing the show's producer to meetings and conferences to share the success and encourage role modelling of the Troç programme;
- attracting donors to raise funds;
- supporting the day-to-day operations of the project; and
- building capacity through professional trainings.

Now that Troç has been on the air for two and a half years, UNICEF has become less actively involved. In addition to raising funds from the Norwegian Government to provide support for 2002-2005, UNICEF meets with the producer weekly, and with her supervisor on a monthly basis, to address problems and share ideas. The challenges of working with a publicly funded station in a developing

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### **What young people write about: stories from Troç archives**

- Workshop on peer education and HIV/AIDS
  - Lack of cinema in Vlora
  - Interview with 14-year-old weightlifting champion
  - Blood feud and its effects on young people
  - Visit to the Shkodra Artisans' Fair
  - Talk with a neurologist about coffee and its consequences
  - What makes the ideal girlfriend or boyfriend?
  - Interview with the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports
  - Excessive mobile phone use among young people
  - School uniforms: yes or no?
  - 18-year-old fisherman takes Troç on a fishing boat
-

country are ever present, ranging from overall lack of funds to the need to repair outdated equipment.

A key part of UNICEF's partnership role is monitoring, to see that young people remain in charge and that child rights messages are constantly underscored. UNICEF also urges the young reporters to use their talents to help build their country, and to use their influence as journalists to encourage other adolescents to do the same.

As the Troç programme becomes more established in the television line-up and ingrained in the mind of the Albanian audience, UNICEF is taking a more promotional role – helping to spread the idea of television as a tool for youth participation and empowerment. UNICEF is also coordinating efforts to help the young reporters take advantage of the growing number of scholarships, internships and other learning opportunities, as well as efforts to help Troç apply for youth broadcast awards as a way to raise its profile.

### LET'S MAKE PEACE A FASHION

The youth in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia have been working together to overcome ethnic barriers – to 'say no to barriers' among young people. Since TVSH broadcasts in neighbouring countries, and occasionally in Western Europe by satellite, there has been feedback across national borders.

In 2002 one of the young reporters conceived of a project for Troç to visit nearby countries to discuss how to bring young people together. Called 'Let's Make Peace a Fashion', the show sent two young reporters to Kosovo and Macedonia, where they met with their peers and discussed ways to

resolve their problems and overcome together the bitterness of the ethnic conflict. UNICEF provided funding for the services of an international producer to accompany the Troç reporters on their one-week tour and prepare a documentary about it. Troç produced and aired an episode about the tour, and provided input during the preparation of the documentary.

### ASSESSING THE IMPACT

The lack of sophistication of Troç reporters has been an asset and is, in part, responsible for the programme's success. The spontaneous, somewhat unpolished feel of the show makes for a new message that is fresh and unpredictable. At the same time, the young reporters have proved that their 'amateur' work is on a par with the work of many professionals. This assessment is supported by a number of well-known journalists in the country, including Remzi Lani, Pluton Vaso, Rajmonda Nelku and Saimir Kumbaro.

Young reporters are proud that their programme is helping to build a new and better Albania. They have learned how to present issues, verify facts and identify solutions. They have learned the influence they hold as contributors to an independent media and to freedom of expression. They also understand the value of spreading positive messages about Albania, as reflected in the fact that a third of their programmes are about young 'heroes' or about the country's heritage.

UNICEF commissioned a professional survey of Troç's audience in 2002 and a quantitative nation-wide survey of 4,000 households along with qualitative focus groups of adults and

children in nine cities. The research found that:

- 58 per cent of Albania's population has seen the programme at least once – a total of two million people;
- 44 per cent of the population – 1.3 million people – watch it regularly, including 90 per cent of the 11-15 age group; and
- more than two thirds of the total adolescent population in Albania discuss the weekly programme themes with their friends.

These findings suggest the importance of Troç in spreading knowledge about the key role of youth in the future of Albania.

The early impact of Troç appears to be multi-faceted. In one sense it is practical and achieves real results, such as the instance noted above where a report on the lack of school textbooks in Korça led to the books being delivered by the education authorities. Beyond such a visible impact are the intangibles – the knowledge gained by society as a whole about issues that would otherwise go unreported, adults' awareness of young people's rights and abilities, the self-confidence and skills that young reporters gain, and the example Troç sets for adult journalists, thereby raising reporting and ethical standards. In many towns the Troç reporters have become local celebrities, and sometimes residents propose issues to be addressed on the air. The fact that adolescents are, themselves, Troç's biggest fans suggests that today's generation is growing up with more awareness of the world. E-mail messages received from remote areas of the country, as well as from neighbouring countries, ask for coverage of local stories. This suggests the extent to which adolescents want the media to cover issues that interest and concern them.

As the young reporters increasingly participate in youth media events outside Albania, they also serve as representatives, revealing its new openness in international dialogue and demonstrating the capacities of Albanian youth. Troç is coming to the attention of such media organizations as Prix Jeunesse and was recently the subject of an article in a book about successful youth media initiatives around the world. It is also an active participant in the Young People's Media Network.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- Genuine participation of adolescents in the media is both an enriching experience and a feasible way to produce mainstream media programmes.
- When adolescents participate on their own terms, audiences are attracted. Millions of adults are willing to listen to the views of young people and learn about the problems young people face.
- UNICEF is in a position worldwide to encourage its media partners to bring young people together with enlightened broadcasters wherever possible. UNICEF's longstanding relationships with national media can help provide creative settings for young people's participation.
- UNICEF partnerships with existing mainstream media are crucial to spread young people's messages to a broad audience.
- UNICEF can provide support for training, orienting, mentoring, networking and equipping young producers. UNICEF can also kindle in young practitioners a passion to make their world more child-friendly and more child rights focused.
- UNICEF can play an important role in advocating for the protection

of adolescents who participate in the media, in particular by providing updated guidelines on positive practices, situations to avoid and opportunities and limitations for young reporters. This would be especially helpful as the involvement of young people in media is new and experimental.

- Brokering, training, guiding and coalition-building are proving to be effective roles for UNICEF. UNICEF does not fund productions, but rather brings adolescent producers together with broadcasters. Governments and media interests should provide the facilities and the funding.

## Peer-to-Peer Counselling on HIV/AIDS in Angola

### ISSUE

Nearly 30 years of civil war in Angola came to an end in 2002 with the signing of the peace agreement. During the war, hundreds of thousands of children were separated from their families, thousands lost their parents and more than 1 million were unable to attend school. An entire generation in Angola was born and grew up in the midst of war and emergency. When the conflict ended, 4 million people were displaced inside the country, and more than 1.8 million people living in areas formerly controlled by UNITA

were in urgent need of food aid, immunization and other basic services.

Another urgent concern in post-war Angola is the threat of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Although malaria has long been the largest single cause of death to children under five, new data indicates that HIV/AIDS may become an even greater threat to survival. The epidemic is spreading rapidly, as indicated by a recent study conducted by the National Public Health Institute and UNICEF. The sero-prevalence of women attending antenatal clinics rose from 3.4 per cent in 1999 to 8.6 per

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“I am truly optimistic about the impact we are having with young people here. Our information centre has become a real hub for young people to congregate.... Some days we have more than 100 visitors.”

JISSOLA SAQUITA, ONE OF THE YOUTH LEADERS IN THE YOUTH-RUN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION (NGO) PRAZEDOR

cent in 2001, an alarming increase of 250 per cent. The large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), the return of infected military personnel to their communities, the low levels of education among children and a high poverty index indicate that Angola has almost all of the risk factors associated with a rapid increase in seroprevalence. Angolans up to 24 years of age comprise nearly 70 per cent of the population. According to the most recent multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS), only 8 per cent of women between 15 and 49 years of age have adequate knowledge of HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention.

Ironically, three decades of civil war had given Angolans a momentary buffer from HIV/AIDS. With so many transport routes disrupted, great tracts of the country were closed to the movement of people and thus a more rapid spread of the disease was prevented. That is why, despite the increasing pace of HIV infection, Angola is reporting a much lower seroprevalence rate than neighbouring Namibia or Zambia. This presents a rare window of opportunity for Angola to act quickly and effectively, to prevent the disastrous epidemic witnessed in these neighbouring countries. But the window is rapidly closing.

## **ACTION**

In Angola, UNICEF is working with 30 youth-run NGOs in 10 provinces to encourage young people to make HIV prevention part of their lives and to bring that initiative into their communities. In three provinces, the pilot project trains young peer-to-peer counsellors and educators. Local NGOs are mentored by larger and more experienced national NGOs who advise and assist in the design and imple-

mentation of innovative approaches to HIV/AIDS education.

One of the national NGOs is Prazedor, founded and run almost entirely by young women. Prazedor began its innovative outreach with radio mini-dramas produced in local languages. Within three months its messages on HIV risk and prevention had reached nearly 3,000 school children. Now it has an array of initiatives reaching more than 30,000 young people every month in the southern city of Lubango, where they have also established a youth information centre.

In Luanda, Huila and Benguela provinces, youth groups are gearing up to promote HIV prevention among diverse populations, such as female sex workers, children living or working on the streets, young people out of school, church groups, health workers and schoolteachers. The leaders and members of each youth group will be involved in all stages of the project, beginning with the formulation of a survey and participation as field workers in the collection of data.

## **ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS**

In 1999, when the idea of involving young people in an HIV/AIDS programme response was first proposed in Angola, many of the HIV/AIDS interventions were concentrated in the capitol, Luanda. There were two reasons: ease of access and the concentration of a large proportion of the population in the city. At that time the needs and wants of young people in the provinces were not yet being addressed by HIV/AIDS programmes, and young people did not participate in the process or have a voice in the actions undertaken by the projects. UNICEF decided that the needs of

young people should be a priority.

In the beginning, there were only a few community structures in place and young people were hesitant about getting involved. The relationship between UNICEF and the youth organizations developed slowly, building trust and confidence over several years. Key ingredients have proved essential to the relationship: honesty, honouring commitments, training and a shared vision and commitment to the thematic area and to young people in particular.

The first step was to hold training sessions for 30 national youth-run NGOs, focusing on their community work and outreach. The three-week training addressed one of the following components per week: peer-to-peer education, project planning and monitoring, and interpersonal communications. After the first training courses were completed, the young people identified a need for new training materials. As a result, a new curriculum was created and is now used in all training workshops. For example, training was developed in the use of theatre techniques as well as in the testing of behaviour change communication (BCC) materials. Youth are now able to create and test training materials for use in their communities, a success story in its own right.

It was apparent from the start that not all youth-run NGOs had the same levels of expertise in project implementation. A great majority of the smaller and less experienced NGOs needed ongoing technical assistance from a few larger and more established NGOs, who were also working with UNICEF in their provinces. This included assistance in developing messages, advanced training, and assistance in establishing contacts with the government. Building on this relation-

ship UNICEF, together with the NGOs, decided to pursue a mentoring strategy. In each province the most able youth-run NGOs underwent more intensive and in-depth training on monitoring and evaluation, project planning and a compendium training of possible innovative activities that the young people themselves had suggested. Those NGOs then took responsibility for mentoring the smaller and less experienced NGOs. This strategy continued over a six-month period and proved very successful in building capacity throughout the NGO community.

In total, 540 peer educators and 300 activists in the provinces were trained and an estimated 240,000 young people were sensitized regarding HIV transmission and prevention in nine provinces in 2002. Although the target groups are principally youth and adolescents in the community, the youth-run NGOs are also working with long-haul truck drivers crossing the Namibian border, medical professionals, the armed forces, students and teachers, and vendors and clients in community markets. To that end, 50 peer educators have been trained in the military and among lorry drivers. These activities were supported primarily by funds from the United Nations Foundation for International Partnership (UNFIP).

## **Innovative approaches**

Adolescents have come up with a series of new and creative ways to reach their target audience and have proved their technical capacity in the implementation of the activities. Some of the most inventive ideas involve working with schools, health delegations, the military, military police, traditional leaders and healers, lorry drivers and parents, as well as expanding their operations into the

post-conflict 'gathering areas' – locations where ex-combatants are quartered (with their families), disarmed and demobilized. One example of the proactive approach young people are taking is Prazedor's strategy of working alongside military police to stop traffic on the roads one Saturday of each month so that each car can receive two minutes of HIV/AIDS information, a condom, a pamphlet and an HIV/AIDS message about discrimination and social stigmatization. This activity has now been replicated in all provinces, including Luanda. Youth organizations have also worked to form peer groups in the military and lorry driver communities who serve as focal points and peer educators. The youth formed an alliance with the NGO Population Services International (PSI) to sell condoms at a symbolic price. "We used to give condoms away," says 18-year-old HIV activist Cristina, "but we found that it had a negative effect. People see no value in something that is free. So now we sell two for one kwanza (1 cent), in collaboration with PSI, and the demand has been great."

The youth-run NGOs have embraced community theatre as a key communication tool. The young activists and actors go to schools, markets and restaurants, wherever young people congregate, to perform skits and plays that deliver messages on how to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS.

The youth of the community also started a dialogue about the lack of recreational and vocational opportunities in their lives and discussed, with UNICEF and partners, how a youth recreation and information centre would be a step in the right direction. This led to a pilot project establishing six youth information centres in provincial capitals. The centres provide a wide range of resources on various

issues. After six months, at the request of young people, it was decided that the centres should expand to include not only information but other activities, such as vocational training in English language, accounting, sewing and secretarial skills; music, drawing and other arts; sports, including soccer, basketball and volleyball; and voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) for HIV/AIDS. Recreation activities include art exhibitions, concerts, chess games, TV viewing and library facilities. This enables the youth information and recreation centres to serve as integrated sites for youth programming, including life skills-based education for out-of-school youth, birth registration, family tracing and a host of health programming. This integrated approach has been supported through the donations of the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

The project has evolved and expanded step by step. What began as two NGOs working in two provinces has become a network of 30 NGOs in ten provinces. This success has been possible because of the motivation and active involvement of young people.

### OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Constraints encountered during the year included the lack of experience and limited resources of many of the youth-run NGOs. There is a need for UNICEF field offices to work with them more closely in the future. Although there has been considerable success in efforts to build capacity among youth groups and youth-run NGOs, it is essential that young people have the guidance they need, particularly when addressing sensitive issues concerning the spread of HIV/AIDS. For example, when young people create messages, skits, music, theatre performances and other

ways of speaking out on HIV/AIDS prevention, they need to know how to frame their messages to help prevent and end the stigma and discrimination surrounding the disease. The framing of messages can influence how the community will perceive and relate to those affected by HIV/AIDS. Once young people understand the impact and implications of their efforts in the community, they can be more effective in building awareness and tolerance.

The need to establish gender balance in the community groups and the NGOs was identified early in the project. Initially the vast majority of the participants were male and, although the participation of adolescent boys was an encouraging sign, it was essential to also engage more girls. UNICEF took a strong position, insisting that girls be included. This was further emphasized during a training session when boys, evaluating personal risk, identified girls as being at higher risk. One key strategy to encourage girls' participation is UNICEF's engagement with parents. As in so many countries, it was not readily acceptable for girls to discuss matters related to sex. UNICEF advocated, together with local church leaders, for girls' participation in HIV awareness and prevention, explaining to parents the urgency of the risk of HIV infection and how important it is for young people to know how to protect themselves.

The programme in Angola also faces funding constraints. Long-term funds are needed to strengthen sustainability and to expand the work of the youth centres. The seed money provided by UNFIP in 1999 is now ending, and efforts are underway to identify other funding opportunities.

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### Partnership in the fight against HIV/AIDS

- Youth groups, youth organizations, youth NGOs
  - National media and international journalists, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors, visiting dignitaries
  - Church leaders
  - UN agencies: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Country Team
  - Government ministries: Youth and Sport, Health, Education, Social Welfare
  - National AIDS Commission (newly created)
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## ASSESSING THE IMPACT

The human rights-based approach to programming has been integrated into HIV/AIDS programming in Angola through the active and ongoing participation of young people in every facet of programme planning and implementation. At the mid-term review in November 2001, young people participated in the process and final version of the review document. Follow-up has also addressed the concerns and requests raised by young people. For example, they requested additional training and technical support and these have been provided. Requests for a greater focus on advocacy have also been addressed.

The importance of the human rights-based approach is that it provides the basis for an ongoing link and feedback mechanism between youth, UNICEF and project activities. This also ensures flexibility as the youth themselves create and implement their ideas, with a continuous circle of feedback and guidance. For example, youth-run NGOs in Luanda report weekly on their activities as well as constraints encountered. Their reports are substantive and detailed, including the number and types of activities undertaken, the number of people reached and pamphlets distributed and a qualitative assessment of performance.

### Specific impacts

- Training and capacity-building for 30 youth-run NGOs in thematic issues related to HIV/AIDS, peer-to-peer education, interpersonal communication, project planning and monitoring and evaluation.
- Training for 540 peer educators and 350 community activists, leading to the sensitization of approximately 125,000 young people nationwide.

- Training for 125 activists in gathering and family areas, leading to the sensitization of 32,400 young people, women and former combatants.
- Training for 20 activists in the military and lorry driver communities.
- Development of a new peer education manual (in collaboration with PSI).
- Development of a flip chart to be used in clinics and community-based activities for the management of STIs.
- Production and distribution through national NGO networks of pamphlets on awareness about and prevention of HIV/AIDS in four national languages and in Portuguese.
- Establishment of six integrated youth information and recreation centres, where activities include vocational training, team sports, arts, music and basic literacy and numeracy, and which provide meeting spaces for young people. The centres provide classes to approximately 10,000 adolescents and young people throughout the year. Additional services and centre activities reach an estimated 250,000 children, adolescents and young people annually.
- Extensive, in-depth training of 10 youth-run NGOs.
- A youth survey reaching more than 10,500 youth, implemented by young people.
- Three new compendiums of BCC materials disaggregated by age (8-12, 13-17, 18-24), entirely youth driven.

### UNICEF'S ROLE

UNICEF role has been to facilitate the project, providing guidance as well as technical and financial support. UNICEF has the credibility, technical

knowledge and brand recognition to attract partners in collaboration. Over the years in Angola UNICEF has established itself as a reliable partner and advocate. To this end, UNICEF is providing essential technical assistance and support, not only to NGOs but also to the government, helping to facilitate the involvement of young people in all aspects of community action. Further, UNICEF has played a vital role in uniting the UN Country Team behind the initiative and coordinating each agency's contribution. Finally, UNICEF strives to broadly share its data, materials and knowledge, both in UNICEF offices and also with partners, new and old. These relationships have proved fruitful in producing results, for example, the antenatal sero-prevalence data and the youth knowledge, attitudes, practices and beliefs (KAPB) survey.

UNICEF has also established itself as a leader in the creation of multi-media materials that aim not only to educate the population but also to encourage healthy practices and responsible behaviour change. For young people, UNICEF has created a catalogue of information materials, including four pamphlets, two flip charts, three posters and a video series, and there are new materials on the way. In addition, new BCC materials have been created and tested, with the help of adolescents.

UNICEF sub-offices in provinces also play an important on-the-ground role, occasionally supervising the work of youth groups. Once a specific need is identified, a phone call or field visit is scheduled to address it. This feedback mechanism has helped to produce new ideas and also facilitate both the exchange of ideas among NGOs and the constant involvement of UNICEF in the process. One example of this exchange is youth groups

training other youth groups in communication techniques, including using theatre to reach out to the community. A nationwide conference of UNICEF-supported NGOs took place in the last quarter of 2003, allowing NGOs to share training strategies and ideas in their areas of expertise.

This ongoing training and exchange of ideas enables young people to rank priorities. As a result, activities undertaken at the provincial and community levels by the youth groups are self-determined, with overall supervision and technical expertise provided by a network of experienced NGOs and by UNICEF. Local NGOs work in close collaboration with provincial authorities, a contact established and facilitated by UNICEF. The newly-established youth information and recreation centres will provide yet another opportunity for young people to take the lead. An executive board has been formed for each centre to coordinate its activities and administration, and young people sit on the board, often with almost half the votes. The youth themselves, through their NGOs, have determined what kinds of activities the centres should undertake, the schedule of activities and the rules for operation.

An important strategy that has informed UNICEF facilitation of the project is the need to be adaptable and flexible as the project moves forward. Flexibility has been important both in the overall framework and in the details of engaging with young people. For example, on one occasion, UNICEF assisted the youth-run NGO Apoio as Vítimas de Minas (AVIMI) in their performance of multi-media HIV/AIDS awareness and messaging by providing a violin for the AVIMI 'rap' group.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Youth participation in the creation of projects and their involvement in the entire process, including the monitoring and evaluating of projects, is a key to success.
- In order to develop sustainable and meaningful participation, it is important to work with young people from the inception of the project.
- Let young people take ownership of the process and outcomes, and maintain a mechanism for ongoing feedback.
- Young people sometimes don't realize the importance of planning and monitoring; it is therefore important to encourage their participation through monitoring workshops and ongoing monitoring exercises.
- Young people need supervision and guidance to develop management capacity and creative thinking. This takes time, but it's worth it.
- Young people should be involved in the creation of appropriate programme benchmarks.
- Young people will 'stick up' for the disadvantaged much more readily than was thought.
- Young people are perhaps the most innovative and creative source of project ideas, both in planning and in implementation.
- As young people become increasingly involved in programme activities, they want to be eligible for incentives and salaries. UNICEF programming needs to address this issue with care. If properly handled, incentives may help to build a sense of responsibility and self-esteem and support young people's vocational interests.
- It's essential to be open to listen and to engage in respectful dialogue with young people, even when their views are controversial or unexpected.
- There is an overall need to approach HIV/AIDS as an emergency issue and to convince partners that HIV/AIDS in Angola should be treated as a part of emergency programme responses and included in the Consolidated Appeals Process.

## Return to Happiness (Retorno de la Alegria) in Colombia

### ISSUE

Colombia has been torn apart by civil war for more than half a century. Over the last decade an estimated 2.9 million people have been displaced by the conflict – more than half of them children. Most of the displaced children have witnessed atrocities or massacres; some have seen their parents killed or their homes destroyed. Family life, the principal social means for realizing the rights of every child, has been gravely wounded.

The threat of violence perpetrated by paramilitary groups and rebel forces has become a way of life for many children throughout the country. Approximately 80 per cent of displaced

children show symptoms of post-traumatic stress: anxiety, insomnia, nightmares, headaches and bed-wetting. They live in fear and silence, taught by adults to keep quiet about what they have seen. Among the adolescent age group, many who have lost parents, family members and friends to the violence look for revenge. Thousands have been recruited to join rebel or paramilitary forces.

### ACTION

The 'Return to Happiness' programme is designed to provide urgent mass psychosocial support to children and their families affected by violence. The crucial component of the programme

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“Some of the children have seen terrible things....  
The story comes out in pieces  
and may take weeks to tell.”

WILFRIDO, 17, YOUTH PLAY THERAPIST FOR RETURN TO HAPPINESS

is enabling families and communities to take part in the recovery process. Adolescent boys and girls, supervised by teachers, are the key. The young volunteers are trained in 'play therapy' and taught how to cultivate trust and hope in younger children through games, art, puppetry, songs and story telling.

Through their work as 'play therapists' the adolescent volunteers come to serve as role models in their communities. They create a link between families, schools and communities, forming a network of reconstructive peace-building. The simplicity of the programme is its cornerstone: children's right to play.

## HOW IT BEGAN

Return to Happiness was created in Mozambique in 1992 when that country was devastated by war and drought. Recreation was used as a method of reaching large numbers of children with psychosocial support. Four years later, in 1996, a similar approach was developed in Colombia, initiated when one of the creators of the Return to Happiness programme in Mozambique arrived at the UNICEF office in Colombia and saw the need to provide large-scale psychosocial support.

In the same year, Graça Machel visited the children of Apartadó, in the war-torn Urabá region, and found that the children were impatient for peace. They presented her with a draft 'Declaration', calling for the protection of children's rights and an end to the conflict. UNICEF organized a conference of youth leaders and representatives from over 20 organizations working with children. The momentum generated at the conference mobilized children and young people in what was to become a national movement for peace.

UNICEF also served as facilitator for the Return to Happiness programme. In order to rapidly start the programme, UNICEF sought partners in schools and communities and among young people themselves. Meeting spaces were designated in churches and parks, or created by setting up meeting areas under trees or building kiosks, that served as safe havens for use in play therapy. Many of the children who participated in the Return to Happiness programme also joined in the national children's movement for peace.

## GOING TO SCALE

To reach the thousands of children in need, more than 500 young volunteers from 15 towns and villages were initially trained as play therapists in only four weeks. The adolescents learned how to recognize symptoms of stress in the children, and how to observe and communicate with them. Little by little, using toys and puppets as characters in their stories, they were able to build relationships and create an environment where children could express their feelings and begin to overcome the painful experiences of war.

From the start adolescents proved an ideal role model for the younger children. They could understand very well the child's world – the games, songs, stories, riddles and legends. In the towns and villages of Colombia they felt the same impact of terror and violence. They consoled and supported each other as the volunteers attempted to bring back a sense of normalcy to the lives of younger children. The play sessions not only create open communication and trust in the relationship between adolescents and younger children, but also build self-esteem among the adolescent volunteers. The

experience of consoling younger children and helping them overcome their distress teaches the young volunteers how to cope. The programme includes specialized support and self-help groups so that, after each daily session with the children, the adolescents have time to sort out their own emotional problems and needs. They also have access to professional help and advice. If a child in the play session is deeply disturbed, they can be referred to a psychologist working in the programme.

The Return to Happiness programme is based on the idea that support is brought to the children in their own communities. It differs from the Western clinical model of psychosocial therapy by offering a community-based older child-to-younger child relationship. This relationship helps rebuild the children's trust through play. Activities are organized that brings children together in a calm and safe place, where they can begin to overcome their sadness. The children interact in larger groups where they are encouraged to socialize and play. The adolescent volunteers are able to observe and recognize attitudes and behaviours that need individual attention. While the basic programme structure is consistent from community to community and country to country, the toys, stories and games are adaptable according to the culture and traditions in each community, which creates a sense of local identity and ownership.

## Toys at work

Each volunteer receives a 'knapsack of dreams' with rag dolls, puppets, wooden toys and books tailor-made by the community. The cost amounts to about \$25 for each child in the programme. And the local production of the knapsack, with all its treasures, generates

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## Pieces of the puzzle

The Return to Happiness programme reaches out to children affected by the war – children who have lost their parents or their homes, or have witnessed atrocities carried out against their communities. The programme mobilizes:

- Girl and boy volunteers from the community who become the 'agents' of psychosocial recovery;
  - Parents, teachers, church volunteers, health workers, and community leaders who assist the programme as supervisors or trainers and make up self-help groups in the community;
  - A 'knapsack of dreams' containing materials handmade by members of the community, including rag dolls, puppets, wooden toys, books and songs.
-

income for the community. The knapsack contains a family of four rag dolls – a woman, man, girl and boy – sewn in the fashion and dress of their culture. These dolls can be used as characters in a story or to represent real life characters in the life of the child. Through the child's play with the dolls, volunteers can become familiar with the child's memories and fears, and also begin to create the threads of a new story to bring hope into their lives.

Puppets are included in the knapsack to assist the volunteers in telling the stories found in the books. Through the use of puppets, the children can more easily visualize the events as they unfold. Puppets also become a vehicle to allow children to express their memories in a non-threatening manner. The puppets, like all the toys in the knapsack, are customized according to local traditions. In Mozambique, an African lion was among the cast of characters, but in Colombia the lion was not familiar to children and a wise owl turned out to be the most suitable counsellor. Subsequently, when Return to Happiness was introduced in Timor Leste, the owl was not appropriate as a wise bird that gives counsel because owls there bring news of death. After consultation with the community, the owl was replaced by a crocodile, known in the local culture as a wise ancestor.

The wooden toys are designed to represent many different aspects and activities in a particular society. For example, when Return to Happiness was put into action after the earthquake in El Salvador, the toy helicopter came to represent the rescue squad. In war-affected regions of Colombia the truck and motorcycle stand for the arrival of the militia and their death-squads, while the boat and horse-drawn wagon represent different forms of transportation commonly

used for flight. Young volunteers may help the children tell their story using the various toys. The dolls may be used together with these wooden toys to make the story more vivid.

Each knapsack also includes two books. In Colombia, these are *El Miquito Feliz* (The Happy Little Monkey) and *Buenas Noches* (Good Night). The stories are about overcoming children's stress-related problems: their aggressiveness, desire to be alone, sleeplessness and fears. The parrot, the owl and the moon are present in the tales and personify counsellors who help the children resolve their troubles. The volunteers read the stories to the children, but also invent songs and create dramas and puppet shows with the characters of the stories. Slowly the children are able to enter into play and overcome most of the worries and anxieties that prevent them from sleeping, concentrating and living a normal life.

### THREE-TIERED APPROACH

Return to Happiness has adopted a three-tiered approach to the rehabilitation of children affected by trauma. The first tier provides general support to a wide population of children through schools and other institutions, and is the main focus of the programme. The second tier is directed towards children who have more severe symptoms of trauma. Afternoon activities conducted by youth volunteers for more affected children are an example of the strategy at this level. The third tier provides special treatment and support through appropriate mental health services, including counselling and rehabilitation for severely traumatized children. It thus helps to increase community awareness of psychosocial issues and strengthens support for mental health services.

Because of the links created between children, parents, schoolteachers and health professionals, the Return to Happiness programme helps to rebuild family life and to improve the learning environment in schools. It also empowers and strengthens community groups such as teachers, women, widows and youth. The programme has demonstrated its success through improved relationships between teachers and children and among the children themselves. This has contributed to the quality and relevance of the education curriculum.

The full scope of the Return to Happiness programme addresses psychosocial recovery, education for peace and social mobilization. This holistic approach addresses many of the basic rights of children, as expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example: the right to play (article 31); the right to express their views (article 12-15); and the right to health and psychosocial care (articles 23-25, 39). The programme has also effectively mobilized strong partnerships among non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious groups, school officials, local government officials, health officials and young people. For example, in La Chinita, a barrio of Apartadó in northwest Colombia, a Return to Happiness project was set up by UNICEF and the Catholic Church in 1997. Hundreds of young scouts and Red Cross volunteers trained as play therapists went on to conduct workshops in schools and community centres for children displaced by the violence in the region. In 1998 50 of the volunteers from Urabá travelled to the site of the earthquake in Armenia to train colleagues in the same techniques. Paired one-to-one with peers from Armenia, they effectively demonstrated the flexibility of the curriculum for times of natural disaster as well as armed conflict.

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### Additional programme components

- Reconciliation/conflict resolution: The Return to Happiness programme supports conflict resolution and the reconciliation process. Local authorities and international agencies have adapted the counselling sessions for use in helping refugees and their families to cope.
  - Health education: In addition to psychosocial support, the children are taught proper hygiene, perceived as part of the strategy to enhance their sense of well-being and dignity. There is also training for youth volunteers on administering first aid to children under their care.
  - Rebuilding and reconstruction: The programme generates basic infrastructure important in rebuilding civil society, such as community halls and playgrounds for recreation and extra-curricular activities. Another benefit is the support for the micro-economic activities of local women's groups and carpenters contracted to create the play kits for children.
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## UNICEF'S ROLE

When Return to Happiness was created in Mozambique in 1992, UNICEF played a key role as the designer of the methodology. In Colombia, UNICEF adapted the programme to a new context and supported the training, equipping and implementation of the programme throughout the country. Return to Happiness was later replicated in different emergency contexts: Venezuela after the mudslide (1999), Timor Leste during the civil war (2000) and Ecuador following a volcanic eruption (2001). UNICEF has since presented the programme methodology at training workshops and conferences on psychosocial recuperation, for example, in Mexico (2002) and in Cuba (2003).

### UNICEF's role in the Return to Happiness programme and child-friendly spaces in the Darien

In the northwest of Colombia, families have fled across the border into Panama, taking refuge in the border province of El Darién. Although humanitarian agencies have access to the refugee communities, there is a high risk of attack. The Darien region is isolated, hard to reach, sparsely populated and dangerous. In mid-2002, UNICEF posted one staff member full-time in the area to work with affected populations.

UNICEF chose to pursue the Return to Happiness programme in the displaced communities in the Darien as a way to provide psychosocial support. This initiative was deemed especially appropriate because it is low profile and least likely to be viewed as a political activity. To get started, in November 2002 UNICEF held an introductory three-day training workshop for 36 schoolteachers from 19 communities in the Alto Tuirá area of the Darien.

The workshop included elements of children's rights, and the problems of psychosocial recovery in general and the Return to Happiness methodology in particular. In early 2003 UNICEF hosted a five-day workshop on site for adolescent volunteers, local authorities, the Catholic Church and other community leaders, with the participation of two Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/World Health Organization (WHO) staff members, one officer from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and two UNICEF staff from the capital. This second session was a follow-up to the initial workshop and provided more specific training in the Return to Happiness techniques. After only six months, more than 100 young people had been trained as play therapists in the Return to Happiness programme, attending to almost 500 children in more than 30 sessions.

Then, in January 2003, four Panamanian indigenous chiefs in the Darien were massacred by Colombian paramilitaries, causing several hundred indigenous people to flee to Boca de Cupe on the border with Colombia. Later, in April 2003, the deportation from Panama of 109 Colombian civilians caused great terror among the displaced population. Many of them also fled to the relative safety of Boca de Cupe, fearing brutality either at the hands of the irregular armed groups of Colombians who operate in the region with impunity or from the Panamanian police. The vulnerability of the refugee communities in the Darien left children exposed to fear and violence.

In response, the Vicariate of Darien, a local church-based NGO with UNICEF support, led the initiative to create a 'child-friendly space' in the town of Boca de Cupe. Child-friendly spaces are designated areas in displacement camps and communities that are set

aside as 'safe havens'. They provide a location for the coordinated delivery of services such as infant feeding, nutritional support, hygiene, water and sanitation services, early childhood care, education, recreation and psychosocial support. It was here that the Boca de Cupe Return to Happiness programme began to unfold.

A child-friendly space may be informally constructed or simply set up outdoors and marked off with tape. In Boca de Cupe, the place chosen as the site was in a building belonging to the Catholic Church in a central location. The building and the surrounding grounds were cordoned off and festooned with papers and signs to designate an area free from violence, coercion or conflict. The designated area was also surrounded by community activities, such as a cooking area and living areas, to help create a secure environment for children.

In the child-friendly space of Boca de Cupe, UNICEF worked with local community leaders, teachers and adolescents to put the Return to Happiness programme into action, beginning the process of psychosocial recovery and a return to normalcy. Despite the tension and danger, the space remained intact and inviolate during the subsequent weeks.

Meanwhile, UNICEF procured the necessary materials from Colombia, including the Return to Happiness knapsacks and toys for children, and UNICEF Panama had the T-shirts, caps and megaphones made for the adolescent volunteer counsellors-in-training. The counsellor uniforms were seen as vital in attracting and sustaining the participation of the adolescent counsellors, providing an organized alternative to the 'allure' of the guerrillas or the paramilitaries in Colombia, or the Panamanian police.

In addition to the knapsacks, toys and uniforms, UNICEF provided the training for the adolescent participants and covered the costs of the workshop and subsequent refresher training course. The adolescents and others who had received training from UNICEF were able to muster emotional support and courage. The Return to Happiness programme became an entry point for mobilizing the community.

Although there is continued risk of violence in the refugee communities of the Darien, the Return to Happiness programme has contributed to a sense of security and brought new life to the children. The children used a symbol of the human hand to show their commitment to protect the children from harm. Each finger of the hand is raised in protection and identified with a particular quality associated with peace. These actions have created a local movement that is linked with the broader Colombian Children's Peace Movement, combining psychosocial support with community-based actions for peace.

## ASSESSING THE IMPACT

The Return to Happiness programme impacts children's health and well-being at home, in school and in the community. On one level, the programme provides a basic referral system for psychosocial support, helping to rebuild family life, restoring a large measure of psychological well-being and promoting psychosocial care for children. Young people's participation in and through schools is also integral to the programme, including training for teachers on how to help children recover and cope with problems brought on by the effects of conflict and displacement. By equipping these teachers with the proper knowledge, the programme

creates a more child-friendly school environment and increases school enrolment and attendance. The programme also has a positive impact on teacher-student relationships.

In Colombia, one of the key impacts of the Return to Happiness programme has been to create a culture of peace in the midst of war, and to prevent the recruitment of children into armed groups. The programme offers adolescents a personal, family and community role that builds confidence, self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Many children and adolescents expressed their unwillingness to serve as soldiers after participating in the programme and, in one case, an adolescent involved in Return to Happiness moved out of his neighbourhood to avoid forced recruitment by the guerrillas.

When the Colombian Children's Peace Movement began to gain momentum in Urabá, it energized the Return to Happiness programme. Many of the adolescents who participated in the programme as play therapists also became involved in the national movement. Their activities in community-based psychosocial counselling and conflict resolution were inspired and supported by their leadership as advocates for peace. The daily activities of adolescent trainers constituted a sort of mini-course in conflict resolution, effectively offering children a visible alternative to armed conflict. In this way the Return to Happiness programme lent support and credibility to the peace-building efforts of all members of the society.

The programme has effectively changed the lives of many children. Young people who participate in Return to Happiness are encouraged to stay in school, and some have gone

on to a career in social work. The programme has also contributed to young people delaying marriage as they have become motivated to continue their activities in the programme. A number of the children and adolescents involved in Return to Happiness have become leaders in the community, and all have developed their skills in communication and exercised their rights to participation and free expression. The greatest impact may be the enrichment of children's lives and the creation of safer, more supportive families and communities, even in the midst of war.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- An immediate strategy for the psychosocial recovery of children in complex emergencies is valid and has a positive effect in both the short and the long term.
- Empowering adolescents as play therapists is a commitment that local emergency committees are capable of fulfilling when formulating contingency plans for vulnerable groups. This builds self-esteem and develops responsibility among the adolescent age group, giving them an opportunity to participate as agents of change and peace-building in their communities.
- Non-harmful folk traditions can be very successfully combined with Western psychosocial techniques in providing for the emotional recovery of children.
- Using play as a tool with well-structured objectives for psychosocial recovery significantly increases the quality of children's relationships and communication.
- Working through schools and families, as fundamental centres for therapy, permits and sustains the recovery of children affected by war.

## Young People Participate in Peace-Building in Indonesia

### ISSUE

Conflict and violence have harmed, traumatized and displaced children and women on a massive scale across Indonesia. In 2002 there were an estimated 1.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country – at least 70 per cent of them women and children. Christian-Muslim violence in Maluku and North Maluku has resulted in thousands of deaths and the displacement of entire communities. Ongoing violence has led to the segregation of Muslim and Christian children, including in the schools. Some children have been involved in the fighting and many have witnessed violence and atrocities. The majority

of children have seen their schools closed, often for extended periods of time, and they continue to live in communities torn apart by religious intolerance. Under these circumstances, children have been taught to avoid and distrust one another.

2002 witnessed the beginning of normalized relations between Muslims and Christians in Central Sulawesi, North Maluku and Maluku. In a shaky atmosphere of peace negotiations, IDPs began to return to their places of origin. Efforts towards initial reconciliation with former neighbours are now underway in conflict-affected areas in transition to the post-conflict phase. However, these processes

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**“The government and the people must work together in order to stop the conflict, so that the children of the Molukus can grow up free and easy.”**

MALUKU CHILDREN'S PARLIAMENT DECLARATION, JULY 2002

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**Esti, a child rights activist from Maluku**

Esti, a 15-year-old girl from Ambon, Maluku, is in her first year of secondary school. She lives with her mother, two sisters and one brother. Her father passed away a few years ago. Esti's dream is to study medicine at the Medical School in Surabaya, East Java, and then return to Ambon as a paediatrician for the internally displaced community. "There are not enough doctors here," she says.

Over the past few years Esti has been active in the local youth community group, Sanggar Kreativitas Anak, established by the Indonesian Muslim Students' Association in Ambon. The group holds regular discussions on child rights and, through this activism, Esti became involved in the Malukan Children's Congress and the Maluku Children's Parliament. The focus of the Malukan Children's Congress is child rights and the problems that children in Maluku face as a result of the conflict. Esti was elected by the Congress as a regional delegate to the National Indonesian Children's Congress, held in Jakarta in 2002, and was also elected by her peers to act as the Chair and Representative of the 2002 Maluku Children's Parliament in July.

Following her participation at the national level, Esti continued her work with the Maluku Children's Parliament, actively participating in activities for conflict-affected youth

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focus largely on adults and rarely engage children and adolescents from different religions or ethnic groups. Across the Malukus, the physical separation of Muslim and Christian children continues, leaving them without opportunities to learn and develop together.

**ACTION**

In close collaboration with UNICEF and NGO partners, a Muslim-Christian coalition of child-focused non-governmental organizations (NGOs) initiated a province-wide campaign in 2002 that resulted in the creation of a participatory provincial Maluku Children's Parliament, held in Ambon in July. The Maluku Children's Parliament was not only the first children's parliament ever convened in Indonesia, but was also the first major event that successfully crossed the Muslim-Christian divide, with more than 175 children participating from all five Kabupaten (districts) of Maluku. The success of the Parliament is demonstrated by the fact that children were not chosen by adults but elected their own representatives through an inclusive, community-based process involving children from diverse backgrounds and ethnic groups. This process also provided a positive model and was a catalyst for the organization of similar participatory child parliaments in the other provinces.

Young parliamentarians from the Maluku Children's Parliament went on to elect a delegation of representatives who travelled to the Indonesian National Children's Congress in 2002 and 2003. As a sign of success and leadership, a young woman from the Maluku Parliament, Esti, was chosen by her peers at the National Children's Congress in Bali

as one of the Child Ambassadors (see sidebar).

In order to ensure province-wide representation and build grass-roots support for the Children's Parliament, participatory child rights workshops were conducted in Ambon and outlying island groups, including Saparua, Haruku, Seram, Buru, Masuhi, Tual and Langgur. Young people played a key role in the planning and implementation. In all, more than 1,700 youth attended the workshops, the majority from internally displaced or host communities. The workshops built relationships of trust and laid the groundwork for long-term children's participation in community peace-building, as well as for local ownership and sustainability. Numerous joint activities between the Muslim and Christian communities were planned in connection with Hari Anak Nasional (National Children's Day), and representatives were elected to attend the Maluku Children's Parliamentary Congress in Ambon.

**CROSSING THE DIVIDE**

In early 2001 intense conflict was still ongoing and there was no interaction between the Muslim and Christian communities in the Malukus. In addition to religious separation, there was the obstacle of geographic separation, with communities often widely dispersed on outlying islands.

National Children's Day, celebrated in July, presented an entry point and efforts were made to organize sympathetic members from the two opposing camps. Women's organizations – both Muslim and Christian – demonstrated sufficient 'good will' to mobilize, and a meeting of child rights advocates was convened. A number of child rights workshops

throughout the province supported by UNICEF and Save the Children-UK. She also joined a youth media club and began writing articles and reports on her experiences, as well as on issues relating to children and child rights. In 2003 Esti attended the Third National Children's Congress held in Bali.

In Bali, Esti became a member of the team that drafted the Indonesian Children's Peace Resolution in response to the Bali bombings in October 2002. She was also elected as one of five Indonesian Child Ambassadors, all from conflict-affected areas, tasked with raising international awareness and reporting on problems facing Indonesian children. In her capacity as a Child Ambassador, Esti will represent Indonesian children at the next International Children's Parliament, to be held in Beijing.

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## Creating partnerships

- Jaringan Peduli Anak (JPA) or the Network of Concern for Children, including local NGOs and civil society from both the Muslim and Christian communities.
  - Youth groups, including: Komite Nasional Pemuda Indonesia (KNPI, Indonesian National Youth Council), Ikatan Remaja Muhammadiyah (IRM, Union of Muhammadiyah Youth), Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI, Islamic University Students Association) and Angkatan Muda Kerja Protestan Maluku (AMKPM, Malukan Protestant Youth Union).
  - Officials in the Vice Governor's and the Mayor's office.
  - Provincial and municipal authorities in the Ministry of Education.
  - International NGOs and organizations, including UNICEF, Save the Children-UK and Terre des Hommes.
  - Coordination Forum for Children: government institutions (Department of Education, Social Affairs), the National Library of Maluku and national and international NGOs involved in children's activities
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were conducted but, with on-going mistrust between the women's organizations from the two different communities and only a few months to prepare, accomplishments were limited. The first year – 2001 – had mostly ceremonial and recreational activities.

Despite the limitations, collaboration between the two communities was successful in establishing relationships and building trust among the previously sceptical NGOs. Based on this new-found trust, they were able to form Jaringan Peduli Anak (JPA) – Network of Concern for Children – and that made national news. The list of participating organizations grew to include Ekkaleo Foundation, LAPPAN (Women and Children's Development Foundation), Rinamakana Foundation, SANIRI Foundation and the Union of Muhammadiyah Youth or Ikatan Remaja Muhammadiyah (IRM).

The Network wanted more than an 'event'. They wanted their ideas to take root in the communities across the Malukus. After some brainstorming, the NGO network decided to spread out and bring their message to outlying island groups on Ambon, Saparua, Haruku, Seram and Buru Islands. Child rights workshops were planned to build a sustainable community-based framework for peace-building, and the door was opened for children to join in the work.

The first step was to identify adolescent participants. In collaboration with the then Provincial Ministry for Education and Culture, the children were chosen to represent schools throughout the province. Each of the workshops met for two to three days and brought together 100 to 150 adolescents – more than 1,000 participated in all. The result was

groundbreaking. For the first time children stood up and spoke for themselves. The timing was also favourable. The Maligno Peace Agreement was signed in February 2002 and so the workshops were conducted in the context of an emerging peace process. Moreover, the fragility of the Maligno Agreement resulted in added efforts for conflict resolution during peace talks that took place in June 2002. A number of child rights advocates who had participated in the UNICEF training had a seat at the table.

The workshops began by introducing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other materials for child rights advocacy. Simulation games and recreational activities were used to build a relationship of trust between the adult facilitators and the young participants. This was especially important in creating rapport between the two religious groups. For example, a 'colours game' was used to introduce the idea that pluralism and diversity in communities is natural and normal and should not lead to divisiveness (see sidebar). Role-playing and dramas were also performed. Other creative activities included poetry and drawing to illustrate the theme of 'Peace Action'. One exercise was to create flowers out of blue ribbons with messages of peace and distribute them to community leaders and civil and military authorities.

The children also prepared for more organized peace actions, such as public speeches and poetry readings. They invented ways to make their voices heard. On one occasion, in February 2002, workshop participants representing all local religious and ethnic groups visited the Governor's Office as a follow-up to Valentine's Day. They performed songs and distributed red paper flowers with messages attached

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## Colours game

The 'colours game' consists of each participant selecting one or two coloured cards and sharing positive memories associated with the colours and the reasons for their selection. The participants then discuss the colour of their skin, hair and eyes and the reasons why they feel proud of 'their' colours. The facilitator encourages young participants to discuss what they feel is the message of the game. The objective is to consider the uniqueness of every individual and to affirm that, while different 'colours' are sometimes used to divide people, especially in conflict situations, it is the many colours of our world that make life interesting.

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## Constraints and obstacles faced in peace-building efforts

- Long-standing religious segregation between the Muslim and Christian communities.
  - Physical separation of the many islands in the Malukus Province, and the difficulty and expense in convening meetings and engaging in dialogue across distances of hundreds of kilometres.
  - Risk of incidents of violence, including the targeting of peace activities.
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### Maluku Library as a neutral learning centre

In Ambon there were few locations where Muslim and Christian children could interact with each other. One of the first steps in the peace-building work was to identify meeting places where children from the two communities could come together. The Maluku Library was one such 'neutral site'.

UNICEF assistance and support has strengthened the ability of the Maluku Library to play this role. In cooperation with USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, UNICEF funds a computer-training centre at the library for high school children from the Muslim and Christian communities. NGOs from both communities have conducted computer training courses, with over 1,000 Muslim and Christian children attending to date.

### Building a culture of peace and non-violence

UNICEF supported efforts to train children in conflict management skills. A network of 40 educators, youth group organizers and community leaders has conducted conflict management training for students, teachers and youth groups throughout Ambon Island. UNICEF also supported the printing and nationwide distribution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) training, 'Building a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence'. In follow-up to this peace-education work, in 2003 UNICEF sparked the devel-

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reading, "Do not divide us, children of the Molukus", "Do not involve us in the conflict" and "Stop the violence towards children". Their efforts made national news.

Serious discussions took place at the workshops between groups of children about their rights at home, in school and in their communities. They talked about their future and the future of Maluku. The meetings and discussions led to friendships. The workshops also created a forum for planning a week of joint activities around National Children's Day. Children from all five districts of Maluku took part in performances, exhibitions, drawing competitions, poster competitions and essays on the theme 'Our World is a Pluralist World'.

Alongside the workshops, adults active in advocating for child rights were brought together for a three-day training on guidance for youth participation and peace-building. This training was especially important for adult facilitators from outlying islands, who were encountering the idea of children's participation for the first time. It also helped to create a community-based structure and framework for the Maluku Children's Congress and Parliament, so that participation was not limited to a single event but was rooted in local community and children's groups.

Following the workshops, a Children's Forum was established with children meeting regularly at the neutral location of the National Library in Maluku (see sidebar) in order to further discuss and identify problems and to plan activities to be undertaken in their communities, including sports events such as football games and cultural and arts activities based on the local culture.

### Addressing the risks

From the beginning there was concern that the peace-building activities might be undermined by violence. Fears were inflamed by extremist voices in the two communities who criticized and threatened the collaboration. Meeting sites were chosen in 'neutral territories' near the boundary of Christian and Muslim neighbourhoods to assuage fears, but the situation was tense. On one occasion, when young participants were housed in the Christian neighbourhood, the Muslim parents were nervous and nearly called the meeting off.

The support of senior civilian and military authorities was sought in order to ensure that the children did not become a lightning rod for conflict within the two communities. One of the neutral territories identified on the 'green line' between the Christian and Muslim neighbourhoods was attached to a military base. A letter was sent to the military authorities to make them aware of the activities that were going to take place and the military was sympathetic, agreeing to provide security for National Children's Day. Some activities for the Children's Congress were held at the office of the Mayor and others at the Hotel Ammans, located in the neutral zone. On one occasion activities took place in a local church, with the participation of both Christian and Muslim youth. No violent incidents occurred. In fact, the growing momentum for the initiative became a stabilizing force, and gradually support for dialogue between the communities was strengthened. The young people found it easier to cross the cultural and religious divide, and they began to lead the process.

opment and adaptation of a Maluku-specific joint peace education and psychosocial support curriculum.

### International Day of Peace

To commemorate the International Day of Peace in 2003, UNICEF and the Maluku Library organized a letter-writing competition for elementary, junior and senior high school students in 20 Muslim and Christian villages in Ambon Island. A dialogue was also organized for children to enhance their participation in strengthening the role of Maluku Library as a neutral place, leading to the celebration of the International Day of Peace, when winners of the letter-writing competition and participants in the children's dialogue conveyed their peace messages and recommendations to the government. These activities involved more than 1,000 children in Ambon City and Ambon Island.

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## Peace Education in Aceh

Pendidikan Damai (Peace Education Programme) has been developed to introduce peace-building and conflict resolution into schools in the war-torn province of Aceh. The curriculum is intended to:

- 1) promote non-violence and peaceful conflict resolution among children in public and private schools through lessons and dialogue; and
- 2) introduce an understanding of human rights, based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as an entry point for promoting children's participation in peaceful conflict resolution initiatives.

Initially, training involved 50 teachers from 25 schools in six conflict-affected districts of Aceh (Banda Aceh, Great Aceh, Pidie, Bireun, North Aceh and East Aceh). The peace education curriculum included 21 lessons conducted over one semester, and nearly 8,000 students took part in 2001. In 2002 the curriculum was expanded and introduced into another 70 schools. By the end of 2002, more than 22,000 students from nine districts had participated.

The peace education curriculum is rooted in Islamic and Acehnese culture, which has proved to be its strength. Many references are made to Qu'ranic verses and Acehnese proverbs that teach peace and reconciliation. One student, commenting on the lesson 'My Mouth is My Tiger', explained, "I learned how

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## UNICEF'S ROLE

UNICEF has played a key role as a catalyst for peace-building and child participation in Malukus, focusing on two main areas. The first is building capacity among local child rights advocates, NGOs and children; and the second is providing financial support for meetings and workshops. Funds for this work have been provided to UNICEF by the Governments of Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Norway.

UNICEF has also contributed to building trust and enabling a dialogue to re-emerge between Muslim and Christian communities. By acting as a neutral third party, UNICEF motivated individuals on both sides of the conflict to meet together but did not try to own or control the process. UNICEF helped create the overall project design and provided technical support, such as child rights training and psychosocial counselling. Although UNICEF did attend some of the workshops, the community quickly took the lead and began to manage the workshop structure and organization. In some cases, UNICEF helped identify resources and local expertise. For example, local partners who had earlier been trained by UNICEF in psychosocial therapies were engaged to provide counselling and therapy for children who had been traumatized by their experiences during the conflict.

Identifying the lack of coordination among local and international NGOs, as well as government institutions involved in children's activities, UNICEF facilitated a coordination forum for advocacy and mediation purposes.

## ASSESSING THE IMPACT

The building of trust and broad participation from both the Muslim and Christian communities in Malukus – and the enthusiastic participation of children – clearly indicates the success of the peace-building initiative. One strategy that has both enabled and sustained the overall success of the project has been to ensure the variety and flexibility of activities undertaken. Another key strategy has been to create ownership at the community level by involving young people, their parents and teachers, and local NGOs and community leaders in programme activities.

There has been no comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the peace-building initiative, although some evaluations have been undertaken to assess the impact of specific components, for example, the peace education curriculum in Aceh (see sidebar).

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Be willing to take informed and reasonable risks to help overcome social barriers.
- Build collaboration between different social groups in order to create opportunities for adolescents to play a role in peace-building processes and become positive role models in their families and communities.
- Encourage young people and the community to increasingly take ownership of and lead the programme.
- Strengthen coordination and collaboration among government officials and local and international NGOs to help build trust.
- Address discrimination, distrust and exclusion openly as the most effective way to establish trusting

dangerous, like a knife, my tongue can be. I realize how easy it is to hurt others." Another student commented on the lesson 'Looking Within', "Now, when a conflict arises, I look to myself first, and think before I act."

Currently officials are grappling with the idea of institutionalizing the Peace Education Programme in the formal provincial curriculum. In order to better assess that possibility, an evaluation of the curriculum was conducted in 2002, involving more than 30 schools and over 600 students as stakeholders and participants.

If the programme is to be integrated into the provincial curriculum, many more teachers, textbooks and support resources will be needed. Despite the evident challenge, teachers and school administrators – and students – who are already using the peace education curriculum have made it clear that there is no turning back. They are convinced of the value of peace education and are seeking creative ways, through advocacy, to continue the programme.

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- relationships across community lines.
- Let young people take decisions and make some mistakes. They will learn best through their own experience.
- Don't try to force relationships across social barriers – instead find ways to engage children in shared activities so that they can exchange views and develop friendships.
- Be patient and allow time to build trust among civil society groups. In finding ways to engage them, allow them to work at whatever level they are able. Successes that result from their cooperation will then be a natural catalyst for increased trust and cooperation.
- Involve parents and community leaders throughout the process. This will stimulate their support, and also help to transform their thinking.
- Look for entry points that are naturally attractive to children and will be supported by their communities, for example, sports activities or training in useful skills such as computers and media and communications.
- Design open partnerships so that international NGO or agency support to selected local organizations does not result in feelings of exclusion among other local civil society groups.
- Plan and manage the recognition of children's contributions so that the success of one or a few children does not result in a situation where other children's successes are marginalized or not recognized.
- Include the local government and counterparts in activities – to help build local government capacity to address peace-building and community reconciliation, and to build acceptance for young people's role in decision-making processes.

## Peer-to-Peer Counselling in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)

### ISSUE

The current conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) has had a devastating effect on the children. All of them are exposed in some form to increased psychological stress as a result of the violence, closures, restrictions and economic hardship that are part of their daily lives.

The Second Intifada began in September 2000 and has been marked by a sustained level of violence and a growing number of casualties. More than 556 children under the age of 18 had been killed as of August 2003, including 463 Palestinian children,

92 Israeli children and one international child. An estimated 9,000 Palestinian children were injured between September 2000 and May 2003. Most Palestinian children killed have been bystanders, in their homes or on their way to school. Schools have also been seriously affected, with 580 school closures during military curfews. At least 269 schools have been damaged by shells and three schools have been turned into military bases.

Restrictions on mobility and lack of security since September 2000 mean that children and youth have fewer and fewer opportunities to play,

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“This experience changed me. Before I was pessimistic about life, feeling a lot of psychological pressure. Now I recognize my problems, I know that I can solve them.”

SAMA, BETUNIA, OPT

socialize or participate in social and cultural activities. In the past year, the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education cancelled half of its sporting activities for young people. Festivals, youth forums and recreational activities have also been called off. In short, children have very few opportunities for recreation. There is an urgent need, in the current situation, to support young people's participation in community development activities.

Traumatic events, such as the death or injury of family members and friends, can result in particularly acute psychological problems. For some children and adolescents, this can lead to apathy, self-doubt, withdrawal and, above all, a sense of hopelessness. For others experiencing extreme levels of despair, there is a risk that their political attitudes will harden as they perceive less hope for a peaceful and just solution to the conflict. Even so, adolescents – their energy, enthusiasm and resilience – remain the greatest source of potential and hope in their communities.

## **ACTION**

UNICEF works together with the Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation (PYALARA) to support the 'We Care' peer-to-peer counselling programme for children. The We Care programme trains university students to provide psychosocial support, mentoring and recreational activities for children and adolescents in schools and community centres. Following the training, university student volunteers conduct a series of school-based psychosocial support sessions, working closely with adolescents in the most violence-stricken areas.

In addition to the support provided to adolescents, the We Care programme gives university student volunteers an opportunity to contribute to their community in a positive way, boosting their self-esteem. It also provides them with new skills, such as trained listening and understanding, and methods of stress relief and peer counselling. The school-based sessions provide a peaceful and reassuring outlet for adolescents to express their views, opinions, hopes and fears, and find ways to deal with their stress. Furthermore, a 'hotline' operated by university students has been established to provide one-on-one psychosocial support to adolescents over the phone, especially during times of restricted mobility and curfews.

Following the psychosocial support sessions, adolescents are given the opportunity to express themselves in constructive and creative ways, for example:

- Print and visual media, including *The Youth Times* newspaper developed by and for adolescents, and a TV programme also prepared by and for adolescents. This regular weekly TV programme – 'Alli Soutak' – was launched on the International Children's Day of Broadcasting (ICDB) in 2002.
- Community-based action where adolescents plan their own small-scale projects to improve their schools and neighbourhoods, with the support of university student volunteers.

## **BRINGING YOUNG PEOPLE TOGETHER**

In November 2000 PYALARA met with UNICEF to brainstorm about what they could do to enable young people to cope with the fear and hopelessness, and the escalation of violence, that

had become a part of their everyday lives. Young people took part in the thinking and planning of the project from the very beginning. Together with guidance from PYALARA and UNICEF, they came up with ideas and developed a plan of action. They wanted to reach out to each other and to the members of their community to build a better future. According to a university student who conducted psychosocial sessions with adolescents, "In UNICEF we found people who listened, who cared and above all who believed in our role".

## **University student volunteers**

The idea was to recruit university students to give counselling and support to adolescents in secondary schools throughout OPT. In the pilot phase, 50 university students with an interest in psychology and sociology volunteered to take part. Psychologists were asked to help train the student volunteers, but at first the professional community was sceptical. Some discouraged the effort and pointed out the evident risks involved. Despite these obstacles, it was decided to go ahead. Project coordinators believed that young people would face greater risks if they were left without opportunities to build confidence and take positive action in their lives. Four professional trainers were employed for the training.

The 50 university student volunteers took part in an intensive eight-day training, working under extremely difficult circumstances. Because of the restrictions imposed during the Second Intifada, some of the universities were facing frequent closures. During the training sessions the student volunteers struggled with their own emotions and developed the skills they would need to begin to comfort others. The emergency situation

created a sense of solidarity; young people felt the need to extend beyond themselves and to help their peers. PYALARA attributes the ongoing success of the We Care programme to the innovative energy of the university and secondary school students, and the trusting and close relationship between the two age groups.

Gradually the project took shape. The student volunteers began formulating ideas about how they would structure their first meetings with younger secondary school students, how they would build 'bridges of trust' and seek to address tough issues, and how they would identify those young people who might need more extensive professional help. They discussed the great responsibility they would face in responding to sometimes desperate situations. One volunteer said that the eight days of training were "equivalent to three years of classroom instruction".

In addition, universities agreed to accept the hours completed by the volunteer university students in this project as 'community service hours' that are regularly required from each student.

## **Secondary school students**

The pilot project was implemented in 58 secondary schools throughout OPT. A decision was made to include schools administered by the Palestinian Authority, schools in refugee camps run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and private schools. It was therefore necessary to build relationships and request permits or permission from various administrative officials. This proved an asset in building community networks. In the

refugee camps, the university volunteers chose to work with some of the most difficult and troubled adolescents. Their target age group was 14- to 17-year-olds. They wanted to work with adolescents in secondary schools because they saw these young people as potential agents of change, influencing their younger siblings and their parents at home, and also having a positive effect on their communities.

At first the school administrators were cautious and some were reluctant to agree to peer-to-peer counselling sessions that did not include oversight by school supervisors. But eventually they were convinced that young people would be more willing to speak in open dialogue with counsellors if they were not under the supervision of authority figures. In these sessions, the university student volunteers were able to build a relationship of trust with adolescents by encouraging frank and open discussion. Additional sessions were conducted by professionals with parents and some school staff to enable them to better understand and support the young people at home and in school.

Initially, the main objective of the sessions at the schools was to provide psychosocial support to adolescents traumatized as a result of the current crisis. But, following the first few psychosocial sessions where rapport was built, adolescents started to raise issues of concern that are typical of the ongoing unmet needs of all adolescents. They wanted advice on family relationships, first romance, problems at school, peer pressure and school exams.

### **The hotline**

The university student volunteers quickly realized there was an urgent

need to 'talk'. School sessions were not enough. Adolescents were phoning their university student volunteer counsellors, seeking additional help and advice. This led, in 2002, to the establishing of a toll free 'hotline'.

The hotline developed as an emergency response to the imposed curfews and closures. Since it wasn't possible to move about freely, the hotline was proposed as a way to provide help and support, including health and life-saving responses. PYALARA published the hotline phone number in newspapers, on TV and over the radio, hoping to reach a wide audience. The response was overwhelming. Even adults called for help. In later outreach, an effort has been made to re-focus on the adolescent population and so the phone number is now being circulated through youth media and newsletters, as well as through school groups.

The university students operating the hotline knew their limits of intervention; all critical cases beyond their capacity were referred to more specialized service organizations. To assist the volunteers in their work, a list of referral organizations to follow up on questions concerning practical survival needs, medical care and psychosocial support was used.

The volume of calls handled by the hotline demonstrated its attractiveness. From early morning until evening at least two, and as many as four, university student volunteers were on the line, taking calls from young people coping with trauma, violence and loss. They also received many calls from adolescents who were seeking solutions to problems of everyday life and needed help in school, with parents or with friends. They made sure to have one girl and one boy present at all times so that girl callers

could speak to a female counsellor and boys could speak to a male counsellor. They found that they needed to tailor their responses to the specific needs of each caller. They could not give the same advice to adolescents living in a conservative rural village as they gave to young people in the more urban environment of Ramallah. Some young callers revealed their identity; others did not. A logbook was kept, recording each call and the advice given so that the university student volunteers could later discuss the situations and the problems that arose, and learn from their experience.

During the Jenin invasion they heard from desperate young people and mothers who were trapped in their houses with no food. They talked through the anguish. They faced their own frustrations. And they learned how to listen.

### **Taking it to the next level: community-based response and peace-building**

Peer-to-peer counselling provided much needed psychosocial support. But that was not enough. Another brainstorming session took place, and together the university volunteers sought additional strategies to broaden their services. They wanted to achieve more, and they wanted to find a way to make their work sustainable and more effective.

As a result, in 2002, the second phase of the project was initiated, linking the psychosocial support and the hotline to creative expression and community development activities. Two participatory modules were introduced:

- **Media and self-expression:** Adolescents write articles and stories, and take photographs, which they publish in their own newspaper, *The Youth Times*, with a circulation of approximately 100,000. They also

### **Components of the peer-to-peer counselling 'pilot' project**

- Young people in schools and villages throughout OPT
- 50 university student volunteers from four universities in OPT
- Four professionals to help train the student volunteers in psychosocial skills
- Cooperation with local school administrators
- PYALARA and UNICEF staff providing guidance and support
- Networking with civil society, universities, school administrators, the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, journalists and other professionals

participate in producing a weekly TV show, which provides a public forum for young people to express their views and air their grievances. They write about issues they care about, from human rights and politics, to creative arts and music, to sexual relationships and health care, to drug abuse, violence and conflict resolution. The media module includes training in journalism skills, such as writing, objective reporting, listening, conducting interviews and public speaking. One child in secondary school in Ramallah said that the experience had changed his plans for the future, and that he now aspired to become a sports reporter.

- **Community-based action:** In times of crisis, engaging young people in constructive efforts to make a difference in their lives constitutes a major step towards seeding hope and creativity. In groups of ten, accompanied by a youth leader, adolescents select an issue to work on collectively. Step by step, they are guided to identify a solution that will not only benefit the public but also fulfil their sense of pride and accomplishment. In Al-Ram village near Jerusalem, for example, a group of 12 adolescents worked together to replace all the broken windows in their school. They learned how to prioritize, mobilize the community, address decision makers and eventually to celebrate their achievement, which was applauded by all their peers and by adults.

## THE RISKS

The question of risk came up early in the project. There was open recognition that young people might face additional risks because of their participation. Travel can be perilous and it was understood that last minute resched-

uling would be necessary to accommodate constraints, such as closures and curfews. But the young people also recognized the need to create opportunities to channel their frustration and energy into positive activities that would bring them a sense of accomplishment and pride.

The university volunteers openly discussed the possible risks of involving younger secondary students in peer-to-peer counselling sessions. Together with PYALARA and UNICEF, the volunteers sought to minimize the risks involved by only traveling when necessary. It was decided that special taxis or cabs would transport adolescents to their meetings. They also recognized the need for flexibility to adapt to rapidly changing security conditions.

The university volunteers found that, without exception, the risks involved in implementing the project were not as great as the risks they faced in cancelling it. They found that the efforts they made kept their ideals alive and helped create hope for the future.

## ASSESSING THE IMPACT

The We Care peer-to-peer psychosocial programme has grown over three years from an innovative pilot project into a full, viable programme for adolescent participation in community development. Despite the enormous constraints of operating under curfew and limited funding, the results demonstrate an overwhelmingly positive influence on the lives of young participants and their families.

A formal qualitative evaluation of the We Care programme was conducted in June 2001, including the participation of adolescents as key stakeholders. On the basis of that evaluation, it was

decided to expand the original psychosocial programme to include the media and community achievement components mentioned above, to build the capacity of young people to express themselves and to create positive change in their families and communities. Meetings were held with parents to encourage their involvement and understanding. The meetings helped to generate more open dialogue between parents and adolescents.

As evidence of the ongoing success of the We Care programme, PYALARA has been approached by school administrators who have requested that the programme be expanded to include their schools, especially when difficulties arise or when the students are under particular stress. The programme has been implemented in the West Bank, but there is a need for its services among adolescents in Gaza. The challenge that UNICEF and PYALARA face is how to take the programme to scale, in order to provide support and create opportunities for more adolescents.

## Specific impacts

University student volunteers:

- Learn professional skills and gain practical experience through mentoring.
- Benefit from career development and new job opportunities.
- Take on an important and positive role in their communities, helping to develop the capacities of adolescents.
- Fulfil university requirements for a senior 'seminar project' in a practical, hands-on manner.

Adolescents in secondary school:

- Learn about young people's rights and discuss issues that affect their lives, acquiring the maturity

## Young people's issues:

- family problems
  - political situation
  - gap between students and school administrators
  - lack of freedom and mobility
  - harassment
  - love and flirting
  - emotional problems
  - sexual violence and abuse
  - early marriage
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that will enable them to address issues and problems in a constructive way.

- Discuss their problems confidentially and, if they wish, anonymously through the peer-to-peer telephone hotline.
- Benefit from the atmosphere of care, support and trust, knowing someone is there to listen to them without judging and to offer constructive advice.
- Take practical action to create a better environment in their schools and communities, which brings a sense of optimism.
- Build confidence and self-esteem, taking pride in their accomplishments and their ability to express themselves.
- Learn skills that enable adolescents to express themselves in positive ways with their peers through their empowerment and constructive engagement.

## UNICEF'S ROLE

UNICEF has played a key role in both initiating and supporting the We Care peer-to-peer psychosocial programme. When the idea was first proposed by young people in PYALARA, as a way to create opportunities for young people during the ongoing crisis, UNICEF saw its value and agreed to get involved.

A willingness to brainstorm with the young people and to believe in their capacities was crucial, according to the Director of PYALARA. UNICEF was willing to listen and to help create trust and linkages, enabling the young people to realize their goals. Potential risks were weighed carefully each step of the way. The necessity of minimizing risk became part of the process of capacity-building for the young participants. Through their

increasing ability to deal with challenges and to overcome obstacles, they have developed greater confidence in themselves and in their future. UNICEF has continued to be actively involved in helping to plan the implementation of the programme, providing financial and technical support. For example, UNICEF helped to identify and fund the technical expertise needed to train university student volunteers.

The We Care programme was initiated as a pilot programme, testing innovative methods in delivering psychosocial support during a crisis situation. Its success testifies to the commitment and the abilities of the young people involved. Expanding the programme, to reach more young people, will require greater financial support as well as strategies to fully integrate the programme components into local schools and universities to bolster sustainability.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- During a crisis situation it is important and feasible to maintain normalcy and routine, to bring a sense of security and continuity to young people's lives – and hope for the future.
- Although primarily intended as a response to the psychological and social distress of adolescents during a political crisis, the We Care programme also provides an appropriate and much needed response to the normal unmet needs of adolescents in Palestinian society.
- Because, traditionally, women have not played a lead role in family and society, girls need additional encouragement and support to participate confidently. Once they are given the opportunity, they quickly become leaders among their peers.

- It is necessary to be responsive to local restrictions and customs, particularly in rural villages where adolescent girls and boys do not mix freely, for example, by having female university student mentors provide psychosocial support for adolescent girls.
- The programme expands the role for adolescents within the school system, and could provide a foundation for a more comprehensive mentoring system. In order to expand the programme and make it sustainable in the long term, it would be important to integrate the training of university student counsellors into the regular course work of students studying psychology and/or sociology.
- University student volunteers

identified, as a lesson learned, the need to maintain a sense of detachment. They learned how to give practical advice and support, and to refer more serious problems to professionals who could give specific assistance.

- School administrators need to be included as full partners in the programme, to build trust, so that when problems arise they can be resolved through frank and open dialogue.
- Parents should be involved from the beginning so that they are comfortable with the programme activities and are supportive. Parents can also benefit, developing better communication with their adolescent children and taking pride in the young people's accomplishments.

## Involvement of Children in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone

### ISSUE

During ten years of civil war, the children of Sierra Leone were deliberately and routinely targeted, and witnessed widespread and systematic acts of violence and abuse. They were abducted and forcibly recruited as child soldiers and were the victims of rape, mutilation, forced prostitution and sexual exploitation. Child combatants, themselves victims, took part in atrocities. Many were threatened

with death or desensitized with drugs and alcohol.

In 1999 the Lomé Peace Accord was signed between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), bringing to an end one of the most brutal wars in modern history.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) for Sierra Leone originates from the peace agreement and was

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“I am very happy that at the end of everything my family has now accepted me back as a member of the family after a lot of mediation.

For this I would like to say I am grateful to all the social workers and other parties that have made it possible for me to gain back my childhood and above all my family.”

QUOTE FROM UNICEF SUBMISSION TO TRC, STORY 2 (FEMALE CHILD)

established by an Act of the Sierra Leonean Parliament in February 2000. As with many other truth commissions established in different countries over the last three decades, the main objective of the Sierra Leonean TRC is to create an impartial record of human rights violations. It was charged with recording those violations that occurred between 1991 and 1999 and making recommendations to the government to prevent future conflicts. The TRC is thus a significant step towards the process of healing and reconciliation for all – victims, witnesses, perpetrators and families.

What is unique about the mandate of the TRC in Sierra Leone is the attention it gives to the experiences of children affected by the armed conflict. It aims to involve children throughout the process and adopts child-friendly procedures for children’s participation. According to Section 6 (2) (b) of the TRC Act, the Commission will give “special attention to the subject of sexual violence and to the experiences of women and children within the armed conflict”.

The TRC has sought to build children’s confidence and restore their sense of justice in the social and political order while, at the same time, establishing a mechanism of accountability for crimes committed against them. Without accountability and reconciliation children will continue to suffer, with negative consequences for future peace and stability.

### ACTION

Because children are among the primary victims of the civil war in Sierra Leone, their involvement in the TRC is essential. The challenge was to develop child-friendly procedures to ensure their protection, helping them

feel safe when recounting their experiences and avoiding further traumatization. UNICEF, together with other UN agencies and the Child Protection Network (CPN) – national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government counterparts – helped to develop child-friendly procedures including, for example, special hearings for children, closed sessions, a safe environment for interviews, protected identity of child witnesses, and staff trained in psychosocial support for children.

The TRC, together with UNICEF, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and other international and local child rights organizations, has worked to create opportunities for children to tell what happened to them and to seek reconciliation among themselves and within their communities.

The key activity involving children was statement-taking at the community level. A TRC statement-taker interviewed children with the support of a child protection worker, to ensure that the children were not adversely affected and that proper follow-up would take place. Many of the children interviewed were already part of the child protection and reintegration programme. This helped to build a longer-term relationship for follow-up. There were approximately 15 child participants in each of 13 districts. Children therefore played a significant role in the overall process. The children related their own personal experiences as evidence.

In addition to statement-taking, there were thematic and district hearings, which included children’s submissions in camera. This allowed children to make their voices heard without endangering them, either by identification or by the stress of the hearings.

During the thematic hearings, statements were submitted that reflected the experiences of children. Based on these statements, specific recommendations were made for each district.

## HOW IT BEGAN

In June 2001 UNICEF, in collaboration with the National Forum for Human Rights and UNAMSIL/Human Rights, organized a technical meeting of national and international child rights experts, child protection experts and a group of children. The purpose of the meeting was to recommend policies and procedures for involving children in the TRC. The children who participated in the technical meeting prepared their own report and recommendations. Key findings recommended that all aspects of children's involvement should be consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and emphasized the need for special attention to children in the TRC process.

Among the children who participated in the working group at the Freetown meeting were former child combatants who were abducted by rebel forces, girl mothers who were forced into sexual relations with rebel commanders, children who were blinded and child amputees. The children were accompanied by their social workers, who provided support at difficult moments. Together, these children presented their expectations of the TRC to the experts. They confirmed that telling their stories would help the process of healing and they also recommended that children be permitted to express themselves in a variety of ways – through oral declarations, signs and actions, facial expressions, songs, drawings and written statements. They cautioned, however, that

children in Sierra Leone society are taught to keep silent, and that in some cases they might be afraid to tell the truth or reluctant to speak in order to protect friends or family. They suggested that the TRC try to overcome these challenges by, for example, using family discussions, creating an environment of respect for children's words, encouraging the writing of grievances on paper, and forming youth clubs to sensitize children about issues affecting them.

Particular emphasis was also given to the voluntary nature of children's participation and the need to protect the confidentiality of their statements, as well as their anonymity. It was also noted that children in the TRC process would be seen as victims of a war that targeted them and exploited their vulnerability as children.

The experts who met at the workshop in Freetown in 2001 further recommended that the TRC build on existing mechanisms for the reintegration and reconciliation of children, particularly through the work of child protection organizations and traditional leaders and structures. It was recognized that reconciliation could be accomplished through, for example, the use of traditional practices and ritual ceremonies, opportunities for children to ask forgiveness from their communities and, alternatively, for perpetrators to apologise to children.

## INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN THE PROCESS

Several political, security and logistical obstacles had to be overcome before the TRC could be established. From May to October 2002 the TRC underwent a preparatory phase, which included an awareness-raising campaign for the people of Sierra Leone.

More than 50 local statement-takers were recruited and trained and, in December 2002, the Commission began taking statements. UNICEF became involved when the statement-takers were preparing to contact children.

In the beginning, children who had taken part in the child protection and reintegration programme were contacted and asked to give statements. Many were reluctant. One reason was confusion regarding the relationship between the TRC and the Special Court. Former child combatants, and also their parents, were afraid that if they gave statements to the TRC, the information would be shared with the Special Court and they would then be called to testify and perhaps even face prosecution. When the head prosecutor for the Special Court clarified their intention that no children would be prosecuted, this helped encourage children to come forward, and parents to give permission. Another difficulty was girls' participation in the TRC process, in particular those who had been sexually exploited. They were fearful and did not want their story told to others.

In January 2003 the TRC carried out an assessment of the ongoing statement-taking exercise and, following this, a second training of statement-takers was conducted in Freetown, Bo, Makeni and Kenema. The Child Protection Network assisted in the training and also proposed a Framework of Cooperation between the TRC and the child protection agencies, for the protection of children in the TRC process. The Framework focused on statement-taking and included provisions to protect the identity of children participating, as well as to provide psychosocial support. A vulnerability checklist was also developed as part of the Framework, to help determine whether a child had recovered sufficiently to

go through the TRC process.

The child protection organizations played an active role in the identification, referral and preparation of children for the TRC. In many cases, these organizations used the databases they had established for demobilized and/or separated children. They had long-standing relationships with the children from previous demobilization and reunification programmes and helped to identify children who might wish to give statements. They also helped explain the purpose of the TRC to the children. If the child was willing to talk about their experiences, contact was made with a TRC statement-taker. The collaboration between the TRC and child protection agencies varied from district to district.

## HEARINGS WITH CHILDREN

The TRC began its public hearings on 14 April, with victims, witnesses and perpetrators of the civil war telling their stories in public. Hearings were held in Freetown, Kailahun, Bo, Port Loko, Kabala, Kenema and other locations. In addition to the public hearings, the Commission held thematic hearings on the impact of the conflict on children, the impact of the conflict on women, the exploitation of natural resources (especially diamonds) and other related issues.

During the district hearings, the TRC held closed hearings to listen to testimonies from children and women. The child protection agencies helped to prepare children for the hearings and, in some districts, the children were well-prepared in this way. In one district, for example, the children stayed with the social worker prior to their appearance before the TRC, allowing them to ask difficult questions. In most cases, children had a good

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## Special Court for Sierra Leone

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was established by an international agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations in 2000, in response to the atrocities committed during the conflict. While it is the task of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to establish a record of what happened during the conflict and to come up with recommendations, the Special Court has a mandate to prosecute “those who bear the greatest responsibility” for crimes committed during the conflict. Those are the leaders who were the most responsible for planning and implementing the strategies of warfare in Sierra Leone, including atrocities targeting civilians.

The Special Court is mandated to prosecute crimes under international humanitarian law, such as ‘war crimes’ and ‘crimes against humanity’ (as defined in common article 3 and Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions), as well as some specified provisions of Sierra Leonean criminal law. The Statute of the Court contains crimes particularly relevant to children, such as rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution and indecent assault. Prosecutions can also be brought for the conscription or enlisting of children under the age of 15 into armed groups or for using them to participate actively in

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understanding of the purpose of the TRC and why their statement was important. In other districts, however, children were not well informed. Some children thought that the TRC could provide financial support and send them to school. The purpose of the TRC was then explained in detail, but this demonstrated the importance of working closely with children so that they would be well informed and prepared in advance.

The closed hearings with the children took place at the TRC offices in the respective districts. During these hearings, military staff were present in the TRC compound for security reasons and their presence intimidated children. The social workers and TRC staff helped to explain the situation and reassure the children. The girls met individually with female Commissioners and the boys met with male Commissioners. In addition to their statements the children made recommendations to the TRC Commissioners, requesting health care and shelter, often with a special plea for education. One of the children composed a song for the Commissioners.

After the hearings child protection agencies carried out follow-up visits to monitor the situation of the children and the impact of their participation in the TRC process.

## THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Reconciliation and the return to civilian life is a long process. For the children of Sierra Leone it means reuniting with families, attending school and finding a place in the community. Families and communities must also find ways to forgive and rebuild, and to look towards the future.

Reconciliation also means accountability. By gathering testimony and creating an accurate record that acknowledges the crimes committed, the TRC gives survivors a public forum to voice the wrongs they have suffered and the causes of the conflict. At the same time, it provides a basis for social and political reform to prevent further abuse.

Child protection organizations that supported the children before and after the hearings reported that the children showed a positive response after sharing their stories with the Commissioners. Initially there were concerns over the possible negative impacts on children of remembering the horrors of the war but, in the end, these were not observed. Instead, children’s participation in the TRC helped them come to terms with their experiences. The children were sometimes nervous at the beginning of the hearings, but the Commissioners helped to put them at ease. After the hearings children expressed a sense of relief and pride in their contribution. However, the full impact of children’s participation in the TRC has not been evaluated and more must be done to assess the consequences.

One of the boys who participated in the closed hearings later told his social worker that the TRC “helped him talk”. He said that after spending eight years of his life in the war, he wanted to do something good. A young girl who delivered a statement during the hearings said she felt it was important to let people know what had been done to her. She felt better knowing that people cared about her and her story. Both children are currently taking part in a vocational training programme and looking towards the future.

hostilities. In the crimes under Sierra Leonean law, prosecutions can be brought against persons accused of sexually abusing girls under the age of 14.

Although the Special Court has jurisdiction over persons 15 years and older, the Court’s Chief Prosecutor announced his decision not to prosecute children under 18, since it is very doubtful that a child under 18 held a position of greatest responsibility during the conflict. This view was also supported in Security Council statements that children do not bear the “greatest responsibility” for events that took place during the war and so it is “extremely unlikely” that juveniles will come before the Special Court.

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## THEMATIC HEARINGS ON CHILDREN

On 16 and 17 June 2003, coinciding with the Day of the African Child, the TRC held public thematic hearings on children's experiences during the war. The purpose of the hearings was to raise awareness about and give visibility to children's issues, and to recommend actions for improving the situation of young people in post-war Sierra Leone.

Many children participated throughout the two-day public hearings. The children who were victims of the war told their stories in camera. These were recorded and shown at the hearing with the children's identity protected. Other children, representing the inputs from youth clubs, appeared in person before the hearings. Clips from these statements were then broadcast live on radio UNAMSIL and on television. Children spoke about their experiences during the conflict and presented recommendations for the future. Statements made by children during the closed TRC sessions that had taken place throughout the country were presented without disclosing the children's identity. Children also exhibited drawings and performed dramas about their wartime experiences.

The official report of the TRC is scheduled for release at the end of 2004. In its final report, the Commission made recommendations to the Government of Sierra Leone on a number of key issues, including issues specific to children. It is especially important for civil society, government officials and child rights advocates, as well as young people themselves, to follow up on the implementation. The recommendations not only address issues directly related to the conflict – recruitment of children, for example – but also refer to the underlying causes of

the conflict and the political and social instability.

## CHILD-FRIENDLY VERSION OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION REPORT

A further involvement of children in the TRC process was the preparation of a child-friendly version of the TRC's final report. The preparation of a child-friendly TRC report was first discussed when experts and children met in Freetown, in June 2001, to plan how children would take part in the TRC. Because of the size and scope of the full report of the Commission – seven volumes covering all aspects of the war and its aftermath – it was suggested that a shorter, simpler version be prepared for children to read and understand.

The submission to the TRC by the Children's Forum Network made a similar recommendation, calling for a child-friendly version of the report for children "as a measure to prevent recurrence of what happened".

It was agreed that a child-friendly version of the TRC report would be prepared, and the Commission approached UNICEF to seek collaboration. Although there have been more than 25 Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in various countries over the last several decades, there has not been a TRC report for children before. It is the first of its kind anywhere in the world.

UNICEF and the TRC made the initial outline of the structure of the publication and decided on the process by which to engage the participation of children. The nature of their participation was determined by the fact that the child-friendly report is an official account of the Commission's

findings. It is based on the full report, as well as information in the TRC database, including submissions, statements, closed hearings and input to the National Vision for Sierra Leone project, sponsored by the TRC. Children's voices are included in all these resources.

A writer was provided to the TRC by UNICEF and the task was jointly guided by the Commission, UNICEF and UNAMSIL. Children contributed throughout the process, helping to give shape to a report that would bring about positive action, for and by children. Participation in the drafting of the report came from three national children's networks: the Children's Forum Network, the Voice of Children Radio and the first ever Children's National Assembly. Over 100 children were involved in the drafting, of which 15 were closely involved, meeting with the writer on a daily basis. The child-friendly report was also discussed on the Voice of Children Radio. A meeting was convened to discuss the child-friendly report during the Children's National Assembly, which brought children together from districts around the country. The children were eager to play a role and were deeply interested in the content and issues.

The Children's Forum Network continued to assist with input into the design process and dissemination strategy, working in close collaboration with the TRC, UNICEF and UNAMSIL.

The child-friendly TRC report is thus a culmination of children's involvement and perspective throughout the process, from initial preparation, to background research, to the preparation of the final report. In addition, the last chapter of the child-friendly version is a menu of activities, created by the children, to outline their role

in disseminating the findings and recommendations of the TRC.

## UNICEF'S ROLE

The process of establishing special measures for children's participation in the TRC, and providing technical assistance and support, was a combined effort of many actors, including the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, UNAMSIL and local and international child protection agencies and human rights organizations. UNICEF facilitated dialogue and helped build consensus among the various partners. UNICEF and other child protection agencies also prepared a formal written submission, which was presented at the thematic hearings on children in June 2003. In order to support the work of child protection organizations involved in the TRC, UNICEF made funding available. UNICEF will continue to follow up on these issues, in particular as a voice for child survivors.

The unique capacities of young people have proved a valuable asset in rebuilding their communities and, in Sierra Leone, children have played a key role through their participation in the TRC. The lessons learned in Sierra Leone will provide valuable experience in other post-conflict country situations, demonstrating how children, as active partners in the process, can help to break the cycle of violence and re-establish confidence in the rule of law.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The work of the TRC is not completed as yet. Reconciliation is a long process and additional time will be needed to fully assess the impact of the Commission and to prepare lessons learned. Nevertheless, some pre-

liminary conclusions on the involvement of children in the TRC can be shared:

- More attention should be given to collaboration and coordination between the TRC and child protection organizations from the very beginning of the process.
- Timely sensitization and awareness-raising campaigns at the community level are critical to explain the purpose of the TRC and to promote the participation of children.
- Children's participation in the truth and reconciliation process is entirely voluntary and they should be under no pressure to participate. In addition, they reserve the right to withdraw their participation at any time.
- Statements from children should be taken by staff with a background in human rights and child protection. This was not always possible, but child-friendly procedures were used when interviewing children, and parents, guardians or social workers were also present when requested by the child.
- Special procedures must be put in place so that the involvement of children in truth and justice-seeking mechanisms is confidential. These procedures include, for example, conducting interviews in a child-friendly environment and organizing closed hearings for children.
- Girls should be interviewed by female staff and measures taken to ensure gender sensitivity.
- It is important that statement-takers, Commissioners and TRC staff speak and understand the language of the child.
- Psychosocial support for children should be provided throughout all stages of the process: prior to and during the statement-taking, as well as after the hearings.
- Traditional ceremonies and forgiveness rituals can help support the work of the TRC but these practices should be in accordance with international child rights standards, for example, by protecting the identity of the child.
- Children can continue to play an important role after the conclusion of the TRC by helping to raise awareness about it in their schools and communities and lobbying for implementation of the TRC recommendations.
- An evaluation should be carried out to assess the overall impact of children's involvement in the TRC on the community, as well as the impact on children themselves.

## Youth Education, Development and Participation Programme in Somalia

### ISSUE

Somalia is a fragmented country that has been suffering from nearly 13 years of violent civil war. Since the fall of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, the Somali people have lived without a central government. Faced with the collapse of formal authority, traditional leaders and clan elders have reasserted their control over local territories, particularly in the central and southern zones. Key human development indicators for Somalia paint a bleak picture: One out of five children die before the age of five; only one out of eight women are literate; only one out of six children are enrolled in primary school; and only one out of four families have

access to clean drinking water.

More than half the population of Somalia is under 18. The current generation of children in the country have known nothing but conflict and hardship for most of their lives. Most are out of school, either illiterate or semi-literate, with little hope for the future. Many are displaced and have witnessed or sometimes taken part in violence.

### ACTION

UNICEF Somalia, through the Youth Education, Development and Participation (YEDP) Programme (YEDP), is providing a holistic approach to learn-

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“I was not able to communicate well, as my ideas were few, and I did not know how best to tell people what I wanted. You can imagine my happiness when we were given a chance to be trained on these issues.”

YOUNG SOMALI GIRL

ing and youth participation for out-of-school young people between 14 and 18 years of age. The programme was initiated in 1998, using sports and recreational activities as the entry point. It has since expanded to focus primarily on non-formal learning and community development. The strategy is to strengthen the country's loosely organized youth groups and civil society organizations by providing young people with training and capacity-building and helping them identify their needs and plan activities that will advance their future. More than 200 such groups and civil society organizations across Somalia have been identified and are joining together in the YEDP programme.

A key component of YEDP has been the initiation of a large-scale training-of-trainers programme, to gear up local adolescent groups in leadership and organizational skills. Access to training and technical expertise is helping to transform these groups into active community-based organizations, improving the quality of life for themselves, their families, their communities and their society. As a result, adolescents are advancing the cause of peace-building and peaceful resolution of conflict – areas of concern in Somalia. Adolescents are learning to apply conflict resolution skills to situations that arise in their daily lives. They are finding ways to peacefully resolve disagreements in their groups and their families and among their friends. Peace-building and conflict resolution skills are heavily emphasized in the leadership and organizational training aspects of the programme.

Sporting events also present an opportunity to deliver messages of peace to a wide audience by, for example, staging dramas and parading with peace banners at soccer matches. Adolescents have also used these

events to generate public awareness of important health concerns, such as the prevention of HIV/AIDS. The enthusiasm and support shown by families and communities for the efforts of adolescents to promote development and peace-building have helped to build momentum. The involvement of parents, teachers and community leaders has brought force to the arguments and efforts of the adolescents.

### GETTING STARTED

The first step was to bring adolescents together and encourage them to take a lead role in rebuilding their communities. However, after more than a decade of conflict and weak governance, their participation had to be started from scratch. Another problem was that local traditions in Somalia do not place a value on young people's opinions. As a starting point, UNICEF conducted a survey in 1997, receiving feedback from more than 1,000 adolescents. The participants in the survey, who were contacted through local community groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), proved a valuable asset in helping to establish a network of young people who would later join together and organize themselves.

An effort was made to encourage girls to take part in the survey and express their views, on a par with the boys. The young respondents identified their most critical needs and problems, and responses were wide ranging, indicating that no one single activity could address the many problems they faced. A comprehensive, multi-pronged approach was called for.

The following year limited funds were made available through the Dutch and Italian UNICEF National Committees. Although the initial funding

was modest – less than \$300,000 for three years – it gave the project a good start. And the young people had seemingly unlimited energy.

The short-term goal was to organize sports and recreational activities, but this was only one aspect of what the young people wanted to do to improve their communities. The long-term objectives were to sustain and empower adolescent groups and build community support. Organizing informal sporting events provided a framework for coordinating youth activities and creating youth-friendly community spaces.

### BROADENING THE SCOPE THROUGH TRAINING AND YOUTH-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY SPACES

In 2002 additional funds were made available by the Government of Japan, allowing the YEDP Programme to expand into a new phase, with a focus on leadership training. The first step was to gather together 23 representatives from local NGOs and other community groups to participate in the leadership and organizational development (LOD) training workshop. Participants were, for the most part, young adults in their 20s and 30s. One of the key strategies was for these trainers – or 'youth mentors' – to begin to work directly with adolescents.

The second phase of the training involved reaching out through local training workshops to a larger number of community-based youth groups across the country. They were invited to select up to four of their members to participate in twelve-day LOD training workshops, conducted by the initial team of youth trainers or mentors. These workshops began in October 2002 and have already trained nearly 700 youth leaders from over 200

youth groups – in Puntland, Somaliland and central and southern Somalia – in leadership and organizational development skills.

The trained adolescents have, in turn, met with local leaders and held discussions and workshops in their villages to communicate their ideas and plan activities for improving community life. Activities range from sports and cultural events to draining nearby pools of stagnant water, breeding grounds for malaria mosquitoes. The enthusiasm and determination of the adolescents has demonstrated that, with support and guidance, they can play a lead role in projects for community learning and development. Young people do not only change their own lives for the better; they also change the outlook of their communities by putting creative and innovative ideas to work.

Youth-friendly community spaces, or youth centres, have provided an encouraging environment for adolescents. First linked to sports activities, the youth-friendly community spaces will be expanded during the 2004-2008 Country Programme into multi-purpose development centres. These will include a range of additional information and other services, with local volunteers offering guidance and support. Once fully developed and equipped, the multi-purpose development centres will function as the hub of the many activities generated by adolescents, providing information on peace and conflict resolution as well as on health issues, including HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. Youth-friendly health services will also be provided through these centres, catering to the needs of young adolescents. The package of services will include voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and advice on topics

such as antenatal care. It is hoped that by providing VCT the centres will increase awareness of health risks, encourage behavioural change and also serve as a focus for 'breaking the silence' around HIV/AIDS.

Various methods, in addition to sports, are used at the youth-friendly community centres to encourage participation. For example, adolescents learn to use music and art to communicate ideas and advocacy messages. Workshops and trainings are also held to encourage them to get involved and develop media skills and artistic expression for community outreach. Non-formal education (NFE) classes are being offered and, in some centres, libraries have been created as well as meeting places for youth workshops and conferences. The youth centres will soon begin to provide a community space for networking among various adolescent groups involved in media, arts and theatre. These youth-run centres offering integrated services are being established throughout Somalia with the support of local community-based youth groups.

### **A FOCUS ON GIRLS**

Girls' participation in YEDP activities was recognized as a priority from the outset. Specific efforts have been made to ensure that girls are given a place and a voice in the network of youth groups. The aim was to achieve 40 per cent participation by girls among the total targeted number of 5,400 youth over the initial three-year period. Innovative measures have been taken by several groups to help increase the number of girls participating in the programme. These include the design and promotion of culturally appropriate sports attire for girls and the rehabilitation of sports facilities to better accommodate girls. In addition,

some afternoon NFE classes at the youth centres have been rescheduled to the evening, allowing girls to attend on completion of their household chores. A neighbourhood escort system has also been set up to ensure the girls' safety. Young boys – brothers, cousins or friends of the girls – escort them to the learning centres and then play basketball and indoor games with their peers until the girls are ready to be escorted back home. The combination of these efforts to accommodate the specific needs of female participants has resulted in a 54 per cent participation rate of girls in LOD and NFE activities.

### **A TAILORED APPROACH**

One problem that has emerged is that each of the youth groups is facing its own particular challenges, and group training sessions cannot address so many different needs. By taking a comprehensive and holistic approach, the programme became too general to address specific questions raised by each of the groups.

In order to overcome that stumbling block, a third phase has been introduced to the programme, involving on-site training, mentoring and monitoring advice for each of the youth groups. In mid-July 2003 the 23 youth mentors who have been conducting youth group training held a meeting to develop the mentoring and monitoring strategy. This strategy includes community visits by each mentor to a cluster of local adolescent groups. The visits of two to three days provide an opportunity for close guidance and support of the various efforts and activities of the groups. During these on-site visits, the mentors will assist the groups in redefining their mission statement, objectives and activities. They will also look at management and

administrative structures and advise on the most efficient and effective methods. The mentors will participate in some of the group's community activities and will update the profile of each of the youth groups, including information on the achievement of target numbers for the planned activities and the level of community support. The mentors will also take note of the outstanding needs of each of the groups.

### **NON-FORMAL EDUCATION (NFE) AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

An emerging component of the YEDP programme is the provision of primary level educational opportunities for adolescents, many of whom are illiterate or semi-literate. The NFE curriculum has already been developed and is intended to provide out-of-school young people with basic literacy, numeracy and life skills. A joint process in curriculum design has brought together Somali and international experts, resulting in a very user-friendly curriculum and a learning materials package. The materials have been translated into Somali and printed and distributed to NFE centres throughout the country. The young people are leading this initiative and are themselves determined to create better educational opportunities. An essential part of the effort is to create a link between the NFE training and the school-based curriculum. This enables young people to move through the NFE modules at their own pace and then earn a certificate that will allow them either to continue with their education by enrolling in the formal system or, once they have mastered literacy and numeracy skills, to choose to pursue a vocation.

This approach gives young people a second chance to acquire basic educational skills that they did not receive due to the prolonged conflict and the

complete disruption of education for over a decade. Many Somali youth have not acquired even basic literacy, and the non-formal curriculum allows them to catch up. A mobile NFE kit is also part of the package, with a focus on life skills, including prevention of HIV/AIDS infection, prevention of female genital mutilation (FGM) and promotion of better health and nutrition, gender equity and peace and conflict resolution.

Young people are playing a key role in securing access to vocational training. They are seeking practical ways to prepare themselves to earn a living and become self-supporting. In order to help facilitate vocational training, UNICEF is seeking to engage in a whole new level of partnership and local involvement. This includes working with agencies that specialize in vocational training and involving NGOs in the workshops and trainings. For example, to facilitate further discussion UNICEF has exchanged materials with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), whose Peer Programme provides pre-vocational education for young people. In addition, there are some emerging local NGOs that are interested in the provision of vocational skills to young people, including establishing and managing a credit scheme that may be able to provide start-up repayable credit to young people. Connecting the youth in the YEDP programme with these organizations will be pursued.

### **Linking leadership and development training (LOD) to non-formal education (NFE)**

To introduce the NFE curriculum and learning materials, a core group of 23 educationalists were competitively selected from all over Somalia and trained during September 2002 as

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## Sports as an entry point

The strategy used during the first phase of the Youth Education, Development and Participation (YEDP) programme was to bring adolescents together through sports activities. Given the near absence of all forms of sports facilities in Somalia for over a decade, the early focus on sports generated interest and enthusiasm among youth groups and also helped to build community support. The YEDP programme has been implementing a number of activities including:

- Rehabilitation of sports grounds and stadiums
  - Provision of sports equipment and materials
  - Training of sports officials, such as coaches and referees
  - Hosting intra-zonal sports tournaments
  - Celebrating international days, such as World Football Day, Day of the African Child and the International Children's Day of Broadcasting (ICDB), with sports events for children and youth
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NFE trainers. As with the LOD training, this NFE core team requested youth and women's groups to select teachers for a specialized 20-day training on UNICEF's NFE methodologies, curriculum and learning materials. The training programme accommodates at least two teachers per youth group or organization, with additional teachers as needed. This core team of Somali NFE trainers, established in October 2002, has trained 668 NFE teachers to date. These teachers are currently carrying out learning activities in youth and women's groups in their local areas.

The first LOD and NFE training courses were held simultaneously to enable the trainers to interact and discuss the overall issues that concern children and adolescents, in particular gender issues, and to map out strategies to network and coordinate their training activities. Towards this end, networking committees for NFE and LOD have been formed to enable exchange of experiences and ideas through joint progress review meetings. Three youth groups, one from each zone, are developing a newsletter. Exchange visits may be organized in the future. Access by youth groups to radio broadcasting is also being facilitated through a training and orientation programme in Somaliland with Radio Hargeisa, in collaboration with the UNICEF Somalia Communication Section.

To mark the end of these first sessions of the training of trainers' courses on LOD and NFE, the YEDP programme was formally launched in Hargeisa, Somaliland on 22 September 2002. The ceremony was presided over by the Hon. Mohamed Farah Mohamed and the Hon. Ahmed Yusuf Dualeh, the then Minister for Youth and Sports and the Minister for Education of the Republic of Somaliland respectively.

In mid-July 2003 the LOD follow-up

training session was held, bringing the trainers together to share experiences, problems and solutions. This session was used to evaluate the most effective activities and strategies, drawing from the lessons of implementation, and review learning materials. A similar NFE follow-up training session is planned to take place in early October 2003.

The overall aim is that the combined effect of all the various components of the holistic YEDP programme activities will lead to the empowerment of Somali adolescents and their participation in community development activities, thereby raising the quality of life for young people at home, in school and in the community.

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES AND RISKS

Most of the activities that young people are initiating have been welcomed by the community. But, in some cases, tensions have developed. When the youth groups focused primarily on sports and cultural activities, they were on safe ground and had free and open discussions in the community. Now more difficult issues have arisen. For example, several youth groups have taken a position on eliminating FGM, with young men and boys pledging that they will marry girls who have not been cut. The youth groups have also prepared dramas and presentations on the need to raise awareness about and prevention of HIV/AIDS, against khat chewing and on the promotion of peaceful resolution of conflict and girls' education.

These issues have been generally well received by the communities because local leaders recognize that young people are motivated to improve community life. But activities must be carefully coordinated with community

support to avoid backlash or risk to the young people, who are so eager to step forward with new ideas. It is important to move slowly and allow the process to mature, and to create good will, open discussion and trust in the communities. This will give young people a chance to prove themselves and show how they can bring much needed skills and energy to community life.

## MEASURING IMPACTS

The positive response and active support in local communities, and among young people themselves, demonstrates considerable early success for the YEDP initiative. There are indications of promising impacts on young people's lives and on their relationships with peers and with parents, teachers and community leaders.

However, the YEDP programme has not undergone a systematic evaluation at this point and so the positive results are preliminary. What is certain is that the efforts of young people are reawakening the communities and motivating dialogue and development. There is considerable potential for the programme to expand and create new opportunities for young people in Somalia.

### Long-term goals (over the next five years):

- To strengthen the organizational and managerial capacities of 3,200 youth leaders from 800 community-based and self-sustaining youth groups – at least 40 per cent girls' groups – and civil society organizations working with adolescents.
- To develop and have adopted by relevant authorities a holistic and gender-sensitive youth development policy.
- With the education section, to provide numeracy, literacy and life skills

education, equivalent to primary level, for 40,000 illiterate or semi-literate young persons, of whom at least 40 per cent are female.

- To provide opportunities for 40,000 young persons – at least 40 per cent female – to participate in indoor and outdoor sports and recreational and cultural activities.
- To establish effective networking, consultative and management structures to enable the adolescents to take key roles and responsibilities in the community as agents of change.

### UNICEF'S ROLE

UNICEF has played a key role as a catalyst and facilitator in the YEDP initiative. At the beginning of the process UNICEF staff, in collaboration with local NGO partners and youth groups, helped identify youth mentors and trainers to participate in the workshops. UNICEF had already established a working relationship with many of these groups, and the new focus on participation helped to broaden the network and strengthen working relationships.

UNICEF was able to cover the expenses of workshop participants, but there was no additional salary or financial support. Instead, young people have been encouraged to generate local interest and support for their activities. Youth leaders have shown considerable ingenuity and enthusiasm, holding discussions and meetings with local officials and NGO groups. Local community leaders have also been instrumental in the process. The idea is for UNICEF to enable youth groups and provide the training and technical support, to make room for their own capacities to grow and develop.

UNICEF was also able to provide, on a limited basis, sports and recreation

equipment and resources, as well as seed money for tournaments. Some support has also been made available for youth resource centres and libraries, primarily in the form of software and learning materials.

As the YEDP project continues to expand, there will be additional work to do, in particular building expertise in psychosocial support and vocational training.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- It is important to include girls from the outset in order to build their leadership capacity, and to make specific efforts to overcome the social and cultural barriers that exist to their participation.
- Adolescents will be most effective if they are able to help determine programme priorities and goals. Asking them questions and listening to what they say is important to them.
- Young adults in their early 20s are very effective as role models and mentors for adolescents.
- Look for ways to provide a range of services to accommodate the many and varied needs of young people. Flexibility is a key strategy.
- Long-term support is essential. Once the programme is started, there must be sufficient guidance and follow-up from UNICEF and its partners at the local level.
- Provide guidance and encourage discussion but don't try to force issues or actions.
- Adolescent participation in events and activities is not, in itself, sufficient. However, it is an excellent catalyst to encourage their involvement in substantive issues that affect their lives. Gradually they can learn and apply new skills towards community development and peace-building.

## Surviving the War on Adolescents in Northern Uganda

### CONTEXT

For the last 17 years, the region of northern Uganda known as Acholiland – the districts of Gulu, Pader and Kitgum – has been torn apart by conflict. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebel group has targeted young people for abduction and brutal attacks, making Acholiland the scene of some of the worst violence ever committed against children and adolescents. More than 20,000 young people have been

abducted and made to commit atrocities against their own friends and communities, and thousands of girls have been sexually enslaved as part of LRA rebel forces. As a result of this violence, many social and community structures are in a state of collapse, and more than 80 per cent of the population is internally displaced. Roads, schools, villages and families are falling apart, and young people are left to find a way to survive amid the terror and confusion.

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“Girls in my country keep to themselves and are quiet. Doing the study and advocacy with the Women's Commission and my peers was helpful because a girl like myself can stand up for herself and advocate for others. I now have the confidence to talk to policy makers about girls' rights. I want to continue to help other girls gain the same confidence.”

AKELLO BETTY OPENY, ADOLESCENT RESEARCHER, UGANDA

Although the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF) are responsible for maintaining security for civilians in northern Uganda, they have so far faltered in the task and at times contribute to child rights violations, including the sexual exploitation of girls. Insecurity also severely limits access to the civilian population by humanitarian assistance agencies.

In addition, an estimated 200,000 refugees from southern Sudan have taken refuge in northern Uganda, fleeing a two decade-long civil war. Among the nearly 27,000 Sudanese refugees formerly registered in the Achol Pii refugee settlement in the Pader District, almost 10,000 were under 18 years of age. Following an LRA attack and massacre in the settlement in August 2002, the population has been displaced again to Kirandongo.

## RESPONSE

From May to July 2001, the non-governmental organization (NGO) Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children conducted a participatory research study on the situation of adolescents in Acholiland. Fifty-four Ugandan and Sudanese adolescent girls and boys living in these districts were the principal researchers and advocates for their findings. With support from the Women's Commission, a local youth groups and adults, they worked in two separate teams – one in Gulu, the other Kitgum/Pader – to design and shape their methodology, conduct the research and analyse and report on their findings.

A local youth organization fully managed the budget and helped the adolescents coordinate their work in Kitgum/Pader and, in the absence

of a youth organization in Gulu, a small team of adults performed this coordination function there. Their activities were also facilitated by international organizations, including UNICEF, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and World Vision.

The objective of the study was to provide adolescents with the tools to identify and investigate key issues facing adolescents in war-affected communities, and to carry out targeted advocacy for concrete changes in policy and programmes to improve their situation. It was hoped that the process would also inspire adolescents and provide them with ideas and additional skills and resources to take further action on their own behalf.

The work accomplished by the adolescents who participated in the project has continued to inform decisions about programmes and policies implemented in northern Uganda, including strengthening current efforts and new projects that involve them in key leadership roles. It has also led to the formation of a new adolescent-run NGO in Gulu and further informed the work of the youth NGO involved from Kitgum/Pader. Following the completion of the study, the Women's Commission has continued to work with many of the adolescents and youth groups involved, providing technical assistance to them and to local and international organizations and government agencies supporting their work.

The project is part of a series of participatory studies and advocacy involving adolescents in situations of conflict and post-conflict that the Women's Commission has also undertaken in Kosovo, Sierra Leone and on the Thai-Burmese border. Each of the country projects includes two sub-teams of approximately 50 adolescent

researchers, coordinating youth groups and 15 adult advisors from the community working together with two project coordinators from the Women's Commission. The overall project seeks to improve services and protection to adolescents affected by armed conflict globally. The next phase of the project is to create a comparative analysis of the findings, develop lessons learned and expand coordinated advocacy for policy and programme change, including in collaboration with UNICEF.

## THE PROJECT TAKES SHAPE

In 2000 the Women's Commission published 'Untapped Potential', a landmark report on the effects of armed conflict on adolescents. In the course of the study, it became clear that a new strategy was needed to build a knowledge base about the experiences and struggles faced by adolescents in war-affected countries. The Women's Commission recognized that young people would need to play a key role in such an effort.

The Women's Commission travelled to Uganda to identify potential partners and participants. With help from UNICEF Uganda, a Women's Commission staff person visited Kitgum and Lira in the northern region and consulted with international and local NGOs, as well as district government staff, including the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale (AVSI), the Concerned Parents Association, Watwero (We can do it!) youth organization and Meeting Point. Discussions were also held with the Kitgum District Community Development Office. Because of the Ebola outbreak in Gulu at the time, preparations for the Gulu team were made through World Vision Kampala in the south,

and via e-mail and telephone with the World Vision Children and War Center, Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO) and Uganda Red Cross in Gulu. The Women's Commission also consulted young people, including Sudanese refugees, internally displaced Ugandans, former child soldiers, children orphaned by war and AIDS, child heads of household and others.

## IDENTIFYING THE TEAMS

The Women's Commission had developed basic guidelines and criteria for identifying adolescent researchers and other local partners, which were adapted to fit the local context. Gender, geographic and social diversity were key criteria to ensure broad representation and to maximize the opportunity for adolescents in the various communities to learn from each other.

Logistics governed much of the selection process. Because of security problems and the Ebola outbreak in Gulu, selections did not take place until the Women's Commission arrived to conduct the study. At that time, local NGOs posted a notice for interested young people and adults, and the Women's Commission conducted interviews and made selections according to the mutually agreed-upon criteria. Organizers felt that, given competition among young people in an atmosphere of scarce resources and limited opportunities, there would be more trust in outcomes if the Women's Commission made the final choices.

By contrast, in Kitgum and Pader, the Watwero youth coordination group received strong mentoring from the IRC, including psychosocial support. Thus Watwero had more lead-time and their process of team selection, which

took place before the arrival of the Women's Commission, was very detailed. In the Achol Pii refugee settlement, for example, the process of selection included essays, interviews, and public speeches where adolescents voted for the strongest team. Also, for security reasons and to obtain a diversity of involvement, the Kitgum/Pader team was divided into four sub-groups, including a refugee settlement, an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp, the town centre and a remote village.

Adolescent research team members were of both sexes, from 10 to 20 years old and included returned abductees, internally displaced Ugandans, Sudanese refugees, adolescents living in and out of camps, those orphaned by war and by HIV/AIDS, students and out-of-school youth, working youth, adolescents with disabilities, youth activists (e.g. for peace), teen parents and adolescent heads of household. Most of the young people were literate, but some were not. Adults with a commitment to and/or experience of working with young people were also included, and many who joined the project also worked with NGOs.

#### **Managing project money: constructive and controversial**

From the beginning, the Women's Commission gave the young people full control over the project funds. If the project was to realistically assist in building young people's capacity and thereby increase sustainability, the young people needed to take responsibility and learn the skills of programme management, including the essential task of managing a budget. Giving young people control over the funds proved constructive, but also very controversial.

Each team had nearly \$10,000 to carry

out every aspect of their work, from group training and analysis sessions and transportation, to stipends for the participants as payment and the publishing of reports. In Acholiland, this was a lot of money. Transparency was essential. The Women's Commission also had to be prepared to address the risks involved, including a loss of funds or in-fighting.

During the initial training of the whole team, the budget was reviewed by all participants, and the groups needed to agree on how to manage it and make decisions based on its constraints. Once the funds were assigned to the youth groups, they were responsible for deciding how to prioritize and where to spend the money to meet their project goals. For example, if a team wanted to conduct research in a particular village but travel there was expensive, the members needed to determine their options and make decisions accordingly – possibly asking an NGO to take them or making alternate plans so they would not curtail research elsewhere.

Overall, the young researchers were regarded as young 'professionals'. Each team member and the youth groups were paid for their work, based on reasonable local rates. Not only did payment help reinforce the notion of pride in and responsibility for good work among the young people, it meant that they could forego other income-producing activities in order to participate. Without at least some funds, many would not have been able to eat or provide for their families. The Women's Commission developed budget accounting forms by line item and worked with the teams on reporting expenditures and procedures.

Problems arose. For example, in Watwero a rumour was circulated

that one of the young people was mismanaging the money. After discussion and a thorough investigation, it was demonstrated that the rumour was not true. Another issue the young people had to face was exactly why they were involved in the project. What was their motivation? Money? Prestige? At one point the youth in Gulu complained that their international NGO partner – World Vision – had imposed too much outside control on the project and on the available funds. They insisted that they should make decisions, which they carried out democratically.

Through these growing pains, the young people learned from experience about responsible oversight. The experience provided them with the skills to write proposals with realistic budgets and action plans. Some of the young people on the Gulu team formed their own NGO, wrote proposals and raised funds to address HIV/AIDS awareness, especially among girls. Watwero youth group deepened its focus on human rights and has developed projects to follow up on research findings. For example, it advises a Danish-funded initiative to increase secondary school opportunities for adolescents in northern Uganda.

The Women's Commission maintains that financial accountability among young people is essential to participation, capacity-building and sustainability, but the commitment to let young people 'learn through experience' comes with the risk of making mistakes that all have to be willing to face. The risks are particularly strong in an environment where there is competition for scarce resources. Those who receive even a little support, such as a meal, may be seen as privileged by schoolmates or community members. Finding constructive

ways to meet the challenge of supporting young people to work together for themselves and for one another is critical and requires long-term commitment.

#### **Designing methodology**

Both the Gulu and Kitgum/Pader teams participated in a three-day training, where Women's Commission researchers and local professionals guided them through a process of identifying their purpose as a team, learning about research and developing and practicing their methodology.

The first task was to define the boundaries of the investigation. This was done by having the young people address a few basic questions: What are the main problems facing youth in northern Uganda? What are some solutions? And who are 'adolescents' and 'youth' in northern Uganda today? The young people demonstrated that they were most knowledgeable and therefore best equipped to define their world. This led to frank and open discussions among the teams. For example, the young researchers made a decision not to seek direct testimony on the issue of sexual violence, agreeing to address the issue only if the young respondents raised it themselves and ensuring confidentiality. Or, they followed up with individual interviews and made referrals for further support if needed.

The teams decided to conduct a combination of focus groups, individual interviews and surveys of top adolescent concerns. The young researchers contacted focus group participants by reaching out to their peers through local schools, community organizations, church groups and camps for IDPs and by word-of-mouth. They used questions on a range of topics they had developed in their training. The

individual interviews provided more in-depth examples of a range of adolescent experiences, and the 'top concerns' surveys developed by the adolescents helped them weigh the emphasis placed on each concern raised in discussions.

### **The focus group**

The research teams conducted their work in smaller groups or 'sub-teams' that included two to four adolescent researchers and one local adult research advisor, together with a Women's Commission coordinator. When convening the focus groups, the adolescent researchers took the lead in explaining the project to participants, posing questions, generating dialogue, taking notes and administering the survey. One of the adolescents led the discussion, two took notes and one local adult, along with the Women's Commission coordinator, observed and assisted as needed. The adults also helped the young people organize their paperwork before and after each session. Following the sessions, the adolescents discussed and wrote up summaries of the overall findings, using standard forms created by the Women's Commission.

The 'sub-teams' could be all boys, all girls or mixed. During the training dynamics were discussed, including the advantages and disadvantages of mixing boys and girls on one team. The young people did some experimenting, and it was found that a focus group of about 10 was optimum, allowing all members ample time to speak. Respondents were identified in the notes by numbers to protect their identity.

Sessions were conducted in the language of choice of the participants, mainly Luo, also known as Acholi, the native language of the Acholi

people and many southern Sudanese. Although the length of the sessions varied, in general the groups spent an hour and a half talking in the focus groups and then half an hour filling out the surveys. Attendance at the sessions was voluntary for participants, and they were informed that their testimony might be used in printed reports but that their identities would be kept confidential for their protection. The taking and publication of photos was only permitted with the verbal agreement of the research participants.

At the end of a three-week research period, after – phenomenally – interviewing more than 2,000 peers and adults, each team reconvened to analyse their findings. The adults worked with coordination group members to produce short team reports. The team reports were then provided to the Women's Commission, along with the young people's original notes and data, all of which formed the basis for a final report produced by the Women's Commission on behalf of all participants.

### **RESEARCH OR PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT?**

The youth participatory research project played a dual role in its impact on the young people of Acholiland. There is no doubt that the project provided psychosocial support and built confidence and self-esteem among the adolescent participants. However, the project was not primarily a psychosocial intervention. The purpose of the project was to build capacity and support development among adolescents. The dual impact of the project happened naturally, because the issues the young people addressed in their research were traumatic and their testimony involved a kind of 'peer-to-peer counselling'.

The adolescent participants found themselves better equipped to face their problems, not only with increased self-esteem but also with communication, advocacy and management skills. As a result, they were enabled to formulate actions in effective ways and to change their lives for the better. The most important avenues of action proved to be (1) advocacy and (2) community development and peace-building. Having been given an opportunity to play a key role as actors and experts in their society, the adolescents became a source of mutual support and inspiration for one another.

The researchers on both teams enjoyed getting to know one other and the young people they interviewed. They confronted their nervousness at speaking in front of others and met other new challenges with growing confidence and excitement. They also worked through disagreements and dissent about the process and supported each others' progress. While they had received no promises that their efforts would produce the desired outcomes, the process showed these adolescents the potential value of research and advocacy, and of hope and of confidence in themselves and others. They developed critical thinking skills, understanding for themselves what young people need and what young people's roles in community decision-making and programming for youth could be. All these skills and experiences are proving useful in other areas of their lives.

The adolescents knew that the research would be followed by advocacy activities involving members of their teams in making presentations to governmental, non-governmental and UN decision makers, such as at the UN Special Session on Children in September 2001. They were thus

doubly motivated to do their best and faithfully report the concerns of their communities. In follow-up, it has been found that the adolescents have formed energetic, knowledgeable networks for further youth-led community-based action. The Watwero youth group, in particular, has the potential to immediately build on the capacity and experience gained in the process of coordinating the study and to provide leadership in developing new opportunities for adolescents to take on additional projects.

### **ASSESSING IMPACTS**

The key to success is to create a role for young people as advocates in their communities, making sure that the community understands and supports their efforts. An open and trusting relationship with local tribal or community leaders, as well as local police, is essential to build a relationship of trust. The young people will then have the confidence to address difficult issues that affect their lives, including violence, sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS.

As their findings created some controversy in the community, it was important that the young people were not undermined by the criticism of local authorities or community leaders. For that reason, the Women's Commission took responsibility for the final project report, making sure that the young researchers were not held accountable for controversial statements. In one case, for example, adolescents accused members of the UPDF of sexual exploitation and abuse. The protection from the Women's Commission allowed adolescents to be more frank in their findings.

One key priority was developing a role for adolescents. When the Women's

Commission first arrived in Gulu and invited adolescents to join in the project, no girls showed up. Eventually, through concerted efforts with local groups and NGOs, the girls did participate and they proved themselves to be strong leaders. But often, when it came to issues related to gender, the boys were more outspoken. Due to their traditional roles in the local society, girls needed more time and encouragement to play active roles and initiate advocacy at local levels.

Some local teachers served as adult advisors to the project and some of the adolescents participants were attending local schools. But most adolescents in Acholiland do not have the opportunity to attend school and so it is not possible to work through the schools in implementing the project. The major areas of outcome and results were therefore community-based.

#### Key findings of the study:

Adolescents are the prime targets of the war in northern Uganda and southern Sudan. During the 17-year conflict they have suffered from abduction and have been forced to carry out atrocities. They have lost their friends, families and communities. In addition, they are without schooling or health care. They ranked their most urgent concerns as:

- Insecurities, abductions and murder
- Displacement
- Lack of education
- Lack of parental and family care, and an increasing number of children orphaned by war or HIV/AIDS

Other concerns included poverty resulting from the conflict; lack of food, shelter and health care; child abuse; and sexual and gender-based violence.

Adolescents made the following

recommendations:

- Create a full-scale emergency education plan to get young people back into school and to save their communities from further ruin;
- Press for peace in northern Uganda and southern Sudan, and put an end to the dependency on humanitarian assistance;
- Dismantle the IDP camps, where overcrowded and unsanitary conditions are a breeding ground for disease, and where people are targeted for violent attack and abduction.

#### Specific impacts:

- The adolescents on the Gulu research team have formed a youth group, Gulu Youth for Action (GYFA), to follow-up the findings and recommendations of the study. GYFA obtained \$5,000 to train peer educators to follow up the reproductive health issues. In addition, the Watwero youth group in Kitgam is continuing to follow up the recommendations of the study.
- The Ugandan Minister of State in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development has expressed interest in replicating the adolescent participation methodology in a large-scale psychosocial support project.
- The US Government Coordinator for Refugee Assistance for the Great Lakes Region has secured funding to expand the secondary school for Sudanese refugees in Achol Pii refugee settlement.
- The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) will bring a group of the adolescent researchers to present the study's findings and the recommendations at the monthly donor meeting on northern Uganda, which UNOCHA hosts.
- The Danish Agency for Development Assistance (Danida) and NGOs are

coordinating with the adolescent researchers to promote conflict resolution, education and health-care services.

### THE ROLE OF THE WOMEN'S COMMISSION

The Women's Commission initiated the project and provided financial and technical support throughout. It also maintained a personal and long-term commitment to the young people, which continues to inspire additional follow-up to the project. IRC Uganda's Psychosocial Program in Kitgum and World Vision Uganda's Children and War Center in Gulu provided invaluable support to the teams, encouraging and facilitating their work from start to finish.

The project did not 'belong' to the Women's Commission, however. It belonged to the adolescents themselves. This distinction was key to the successful outcome, and also necessary to the development of the young people's genuine participation and capacity-building throughout the implementation.

This meant that adults involved in the project needed to come to terms with their relatively limited role as guides and facilitators in the service of the young people's leadership. The role of adults was to keep the young people generally on track and to help them organize themselves. The adult advisor would intervene in the young people's conversations and decision-making only when necessary or requested.

At first, it was difficult for the adults to put aside traditional authority structures that give precedence to their opinions or ways of doing things. By their own admission, they had trouble

resisting impulses to fill gaps of silence with their own thoughts or to jump in with help rather than letting the adolescent researchers work through their tasks. Ultimately, however, most adults managed to assist the adolescents well, offering them helpful suggestions rather than trying to instruct or direct them.

Adults interviewed by adolescents were also largely welcoming of the young people's research activities and responded to them openly as long as the researchers showed them the proper respect. Younger adolescents were especially in need of guidance from adults and older adolescents in undertaking their research responsibilities. All the adults were impressed by the enormous dedication of the adolescent researchers and their ability to accomplish their work so successfully.

#### Participation, not manipulation

Adolescent researchers found that there is a fine line between adult guidance and manipulation, and that efforts must be made to allow young people to set their own goals and determine their own priorities. By talking to hundreds of their peers, the adolescent researchers learned about the problems faced by their friends and what they wanted to do to try to solve them. They were eager for adult guidance but not control, and they enjoyed taking on responsibility and becoming respected spokespersons.

The research process in northern Uganda demonstrated that adolescents' ability to be proactive decision makers decreases the risk of their becoming merely passive observers of programmes and policies that happen around them or, worse, being manipulated by adults – even those

adults with their best interests at heart. If the adolescent researchers had not been able to shape the questioning of their peers and adults, and review the budget and make decisions about its implementation, they would have essentially been following the direction of adults. Challenging adult control over finances on the Gulu team was a turning point that led to genuine adolescent leadership. Moreover, the adolescents showed a healthy scepticism during their work, questioning and shaping the process in ways that made sense and seemed fair to them. Without these experiences, adolescents would run the risk being co-opted into processes that may simply use them, rather than helping to develop their skills or to empower them.

One of the young people who co-founded the GYFA organization, following participation in the initial research and advocacy work, had this to say:

“On the personal side, doing this research has increased my understanding of gender and development issues. I came to understand those terms more as we met more people, and I realized that we are addressing only the effects but not the causes of gender discrimination, and a shift is necessary. GYFA is working to sensitize other young people to the causes, not just the responses.... We haven't, however, achieved as many goals as we hoped. When we started a project related to reproductive health, an adult responsible for this sort of work in the town was angry that he wasn't consulted before we began. Consulting him would have been fine, but we don't need scrutiny so much as we need technical support. A lot of adults just want to be paid, not to be really helpful. There's too much corruption, and we need to get around this. So, sometimes we

have to be very careful about how we work with adults. They also don't always trust us with new initiatives because we don't have so much experience. We need to continue to build our partnerships through experience and show the effects of our work.”

### LESSONS LEARNED

- Trust and openness are necessary ingredients to allow something to happen. Be transparent about goals, objectives and problems — it will build trust and bring the best results.
- Adolescents are a source of enormous and invaluable ability, creativity, energy and enthusiasm. With proper guidance, their ideas and efforts can make an important contribution to resolving conflict and rebuilding communities.
- Adolescents enjoy and learn from engaging in constructive activities, especially when they are making decisions, providing leadership and taking action. With encouragement, support and guidance, their participation builds capacity in ways that are useful to their lives beyond the tasks at hand.
- Care should be taken that well-intended participatory processes do not impose adult views and values, and result in further manipulation of adolescents. Full participation goes beyond consultation to decision-making and opportunities for leadership.
- Involving young people in research and assessment places them in a position to advocate on their own behalf and to enter community discussions using information and knowledge gained, adding legitimacy to their contributions.
- The variations in experience, skills and perceptions, including about

- themselves, that adolescents bring to their activities influence the quality and nature of their participation.
- A core group of adolescents need to be literate, to deal with the focus groups and surveys. Others can learn along the way.
- It's possible to reach adolescents who are out of school through youth groups, NGOs, church groups and other community-based organizations. It's important to have some

- adolescents in the project who are not in school, to create diversity and prevent exclusion.
- It's possible to provide direct support for the project at intervals. In this case, the Women's Commission helped set up the project and then went back to New York, where they provided support from a distance. They later returned to Acholiland to help draw up the conclusions and outcomes.

## Participation of Young People in the DDR Process in Sierra Leone

### CONTEXT

Boys and girls, some as young as five, fought as combatants in Sierra Leone's internal armed conflict. Children were singled out for recruitment by both the armed opposition and forces fighting in support of the government because they were obedient and easily manipulated.

Most of the children who fought with rebel forces were abducted from their homes and families at a very young age, and many were forced to kill and mutilate under the influence of drugs or alcohol or simply out of fear. Former child combatants often say that they do not know why Sierra Leoneans were killed by Sierra Leoneans.

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“It is important for you to know that the journey I have made so far has been less difficult because I entered the DDR programme. I did bad things in the bush and I saw very bad things done to both children and adults. Removing the gun from me was a vital step for me. The programme helped me feel natural and normal again. It helped me develop ways to fit into society again.”

ALHAJI BABA SAWANEH, FORMER CHILD SOLDIER WITH THE RUF,  
ADDRESSING THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON 20 NOVEMBER 2001

Children associated with rebel forces were used for various functions. Some were combatants; others were porters, cooks or spies. Thousands of girls were abducted and forced to provide sexual services to male soldiers. Hundreds of thousands of other children in Sierra Leone were also affected by the war, through exposure to violence and traumatic events, loss of family members, loss of home and continual violations of their basic human rights.

On 7 July 1999, in Lomé, the Government of Sierra Leone and the armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF) signed a peace agreement that was to end the country's eight-year conflict. The difficult task of disarming and demobilizing very large numbers of child combatants and helping them to return to a normal life with their families and communities began. When demobilization was completed in January 2002, almost 70,000 ex-combatants had been demobilized and given resettlement benefits. Of that total, almost 7,000 were children.

### ACTION

The creation of an official disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme in Sierra Leone was a central tenet of the Lomé peace accord, the first such agreement to recognize the special needs of children in the DDR process. UNICEF was the lead agency for child protection during the process. Children who had been separated from their families were demobilized and transferred to interim care centres (ICCs) supported by UNICEF. They were provided with health-care services and psychosocial counselling, and participated in educational and recreational activities while family tracing and

reunification were in progress.

During the disarmament process there was little opportunity for young people's participation. The primary objective was to separate children from the adult combatants as soon as possible and to move them to ICCs for tracing. The goal of the demobilization process was to provide a structured and supportive environment, but not institutionalization. The ICCs were intended for as short a stay as possible, before the children were reunited with their families and communities.

Although there was recognition of the need to promote children's participation, the atrocities that had occurred during the war initially led to a level of caution and control in the centres that allowed little room for children's expression. In some cases, there was a lack of communication, and misinformation resulted. The children and even the adults did not know what to expect or what roles they would play. Added to this was a long-standing cultural resistance to children making decisions about their lives. However, there have been more opportunities for young people's participation during the reintegration process, particularly during community reconciliation.

The strategy that proved most effective in engaging children's participation during DDR was an approach that promoted both their rights and responsibilities. Most children in Sierra Leone take on some responsibility for the welfare of the family from a young age, but the war forced children into situations where they had to cope and think for themselves. Children who were part of the fighting forces often found themselves in positions of authority. This distortion of a child's role created problems, but a number of children had experience that could

be re-shaped so that they could learn to take on new responsibilities and return as responsible members of society. The children needed opportunities to rebuild their confidence and self-esteem and regain the trust of their communities.

The involvement of children in education and child rights was particularly effective, as was the responsibility placed on older children in the ICCs to watch over younger children and provide a positive role model. No matter how structured the centre's activities were, however, agencies began to realize that rehabilitation was not just about the psychological process of normalization, or a matter of education or skills training for a new way of life. Former child soldiers had to work out ways of forging new social identities for themselves in post-conflict Sierra Leone. In town meetings and carnivals and on radio broadcasts children were given the opportunity to speak to the village people, asking for and receiving the forgiveness of their communities for the acts of violence they had committed during the war. They also developed 'jingos' or short songs expressing their feelings and their wish to return to their communities, and they performed these songs in village settings and on the radio. All these activities allowed them to reach out and express themselves and give voice to their feelings.

Although the overall DDR process was successful, it is important to note that the success varied from region to region according to local circumstances and the capacity of implementing partners.

## **FINDING THE KEY TO UNLOCK YOUNG PEOPLE'S CAPACITY**

### **Psychosocial support**

In order to return children to their communities, it was necessary to find a way to overcome the horrors they had experienced during the war. The enormity of the task – providing psychosocial support to thousands of children – was daunting. Initially every effort was needed to help create a 'normal' environment for children, to restore their hope in the future and equip them to return to society. Education, skills training, sports and cultural activities were encouraged to help the children develop relationships with each other, with their counsellors and with their communities.

UNICEF and its partners have taken a broad approach to the implementation of psychosocial services. The approach focuses on the need for rehabilitation and recovery, as well as community-based reintegration. It has been possible in some cases for children to play an active role and to express themselves through drama, group discussion, music and art. Another important activity that has been crucial to the reintegration process is traditional practices, where children who have been with the fighting forces are accepted back into their families and communities through forgiveness rituals and ceremonies, frequently combined with a psychosocial approach involving performances of music or drama. These traditional practices are intended to repair the wrongs committed and restore social harmony. In some cases, a purification ritual was performed where children bathed the feet of their mothers and then drank the water, in order to purify themselves before the community and appease the ancestral deities.

Some participatory psychosocial support was also made available. For example, some children who had been successfully reunited with their families through ICCs later assisted in the reunification of other former fighters, providing peer-to-peer support and encouraging children to return to their families and communities.

### **Education**

From the beginning of the reintegration process it was clear that education would be the most powerful force in the process of social reintegration. By the middle of 2002 UNICEF, together with other child protection agencies, had begun to focus on the Community Education Investment Programme (CEIP). In fact, the programme was largely a response to the growing demand from children themselves, who said that going back to school was their greatest desire. CEIP was initiated in 2001 by the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR), working together with UNICEF and implementing partners. It was intended to provide a standard package of material assistance to communities to support education efforts as children reintegrated back into their communities. The programme hinges on war-affected children being admitted to schools without payment of fees. Instead of tuition fees, the schools participating in CEIP receive in-kind support, including teaching, learning and recreational materials such as textbooks and exercise books, pencils, pens, chalk, footballs and volleyballs, as well as classroom furniture.

Initially CEIP was intended to provide temporary support to re-start a devastated educational system. One year of education was guaranteed for former child soldiers, which relieved families of the initial financial burden

for enrolment and proved an easy and cost-effective way to get children back in school. It also helped schools deal with their desperate need for supplies and provided educational assistance at a crucial time, when the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports was not able to institute a national programme. Due to the success of CEIP it was continued and, as of September 2003, more than 3,000 children were receiving support. However, the CEIP programme is dependent on funding and is experiencing difficulty in maintaining adequate long-term support for the thousands of children still waiting to return to school. Discussion is underway to devise a transition plan so that educational support can continue, but it will be broadened to benefit all children in the national education programme.

### **Children's Clubs in the Community-Based Reintegration Programme**

By early 2002 it became clear that a change was needed in the Child Protection Network (CPN), in order to develop a participatory and therefore more sustainable approach to reintegration. To accomplish that shift in focus, planning meetings and workshops were arranged together with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) in April and May 2002. This initial pre-planning was followed by additional discussions between the MSWGCA and implementing partners in January 2003. A Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop was also conducted with the CPN in January 2003, which engaged local leaders and CPN members in developing a strategy for community-based reintegration.

Children's Clubs are a key peer-group component of the transitional activities in the Community-Based Reintegration

Programme. The goal of the clubs is to sensitize and motivate children in community participation so that they are able to integrate themselves into community life. Children's Clubs serve many diverse functions, from offering recreation and education opportunities, to providing social support, to affording opportunities for participation in community service. Membership is based on the location of children's home village. The clubs provide a vehicle for children to participate and take on leadership roles in their communities in the rebuilding of social services.

The Children's Clubs are a new initiative and have progressed further in some regions than in others. In the east, in Kailahun and Kono districts, the clubs have already been established and are beginning to function. For example, during the Paramount Chieftancy Election in December 2002, Children's Clubs throughout the District organized peace-building activities, such as community discussions and meetings, as well as dances, musical performances and other cultural activities geared towards reconciliation and peace-building. In the north the clubs are only just beginning to be established, but there is considerable interest on the part of children and indications that the clubs will become active. In the south, in Bo and Bonthe Districts, the Children's Clubs are active in community peace-building and activities such as town clean-up, which contributes to improving the health, sanitation and hygiene of communities.

Topics covered at club meetings include club management, participation in community activities, education, skills training, traditional and recreational activities, sporting events, youth-to-youth peer counselling, health care and HIV/AIDS awareness,

and career development. Clubs also organize agricultural and small business projects, helping to generate income for young people. In one community the Children's Club raised money to purchase a projector that they have used for video shows, charging a small admission fee. The 'video theatre' has proved a popular source of entertainment in the town.

The Children's Clubs decide for themselves what they want to focus on, and the child protection agencies help them accomplish their goals. Representatives of the Children's Clubs also participate in the community-based Child Welfare Committees (CWC), which include community leaders, religious leaders, teachers and parents, and are instrumental in supporting children's reintegration and promoting education, health and development. This links the Children's Clubs to community life and objectives. Efforts are underway to organize the local Children's Clubs at the national level through the Children's Forum Network, which currently exists in Freetown, and at regional levels, i.e. Makeni, Bo and Kenema. This will allow the children to organize regional and, ultimately, national events.

Although girls play an active role in the Children's Clubs they have not taken on leadership roles in most cases. Specific strategies are needed to help girl members of the clubs overcome social and cultural barriers to their participation so that their needs and interests are addressed in meetings and group activities. Special efforts are also needed to include children with disabilities in club activities and to take into account differing levels of literacy among members.

## VOCATIONAL TRAINING

For some of the older children, between the ages of 15 and 17, the idea of returning to school can be frustrating and difficult. Their interests may be more suited to learning vocational skills so that they can find work and earn an income. Vocational training activities have served these older youth, helping to develop their talents in business and trade.

During the reintegration process, young people were given the opportunity to choose a skill to acquire and, in some districts, they have successfully apprenticed with local artisans in their communities. For example, apprenticeship programmes offer opportunities in carpentry, auto mechanics, masonry, tailoring, baking, tie-dyeing and hairdressing. But training alone does not create employment. A problem arose because there were too few opportunities, and too many youth in urgent need of help and support.

An additional problem was that some adolescents chose or were placed in training courses that did not adequately consider future job opportunities. For example, some youth wanted to learn auto mechanics, but there were no vehicles to service in their communities. This lack of coordination occurred primarily as a result of the failure to involve children and their communities in the planning. It was soon evident that the key to a successful apprenticeship programme is establishing links with the local labour market from the outset, and creating partnerships and alliances with the private sector. By involving children as well as members of the local economy, it is possible to design vocational training that is personally rewarding and relevant.

The vocational training has begun to focus on helping children explore a number of different activities and options for their future. During follow-up some adolescents have given feedback and have been able to make a more informed choice about which skill is most desirable and useful to pursue as part of their reintegration plan, based on their own talents and aptitudes and on a needs assessment of their home locale.

## Sports

In the ICCs sport was used to encourage interaction between children in the centres and local children. The children in the ICCs and the children from the communities formed teams and played and competed with other teams in nearby communities. This has helped them become friends and overcome the barriers that were created by the war. Later, as children were reintegrated into community schools, sports continued to play a key role in helping to rebuild self-esteem and to make it easier for children to relate to their peers.

Team sports are especially successful in encouraging children and adolescents to form friendships and to interact in a positive way. Sports activities can channel aggression, allowing children to learn non-violent methods of conflict resolution. Sport teaches children about fair play, teamwork and respect for others. It gives everyone a chance to join in and participate, to become part of the team.

Since September 2002, the non-governmental organization (NGO) Right To Play has been training coaches in Freetown and the surrounding regions of Koidu and Makeni. Right To Play, together with its partner NGOs, including the International Rescue

Committee (IRC), Caritas Makeni, Enfants Refugees du Monde and the Association of Sports to Improve Refugees (ASPIR), is working to build a national network of trained coaches to work with former child combatants.

## **OVERCOMING OBSTACLES**

### **Specific needs of girls**

Disarmament as a military exercise has consistently failed to attract female combatants and, in particular, girls who have been abducted or forced to provide sexual services to armed groups. This was also the case in Sierra Leone. As disarmament is the entry point into the DDR process it is essential that strategies are developed to ensure girls' full participation.

In the rush to accommodate the thousands of boy soldiers in Sierra Leone, the majority of girl soldiers who had been abducted, sexually abused and forced to accompany armed groups received far less attention. These girls, some of whom were 'camp followers', were included as part of the command structure in armed groups and many took part in the fighting. If they were assigned to a commander, they assumed a commander's status. However, under the watchful and controlling eye of their commanders, they were often afraid to step forward and participate in the demobilization process. In some cases, commanders did not allow the girls whom they had taken as 'wives' to enter into the DDR process.

Some former girl soldiers moved into the ICCs and reintegration phase, but insufficient attention was given to gender-specific services. In addition to the failure of the demobilization process to address their rights, the girls had their own reasons to avoid the DDR programme. Little had been done

to sensitize communities about the victimization of girls during the conflict and most girls feared the stigma of admitting eligibility for demobilization. Many girls were aware of the risks of sexual infections they carried as a result of their abuse. They were afraid that the sexual abuse they had suffered and their lack of knowledge with regard to domestic chores and community values would make them unwanted.

Young mothers were especially vulnerable because their babies were perceived as 'rebel children'. Many found it difficult to return to village life. Fearing the rejection of their families and communities, they returned to their commander 'husbands', or stayed in the city where they remain vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

In order to begin to respond to the rights of these girls, an intensive intervention was designed by the UNICEF Country Office within the framework of the CPN and the Community-Based Reintegration Programme. It provides support for girls who were abducted by the fighting forces and also proactively seeks to serve girls and young women in need. Services include medical and reproductive health care, psychosocial counselling, life skills and vocational training, childcare, and traditional ceremonies to expedite reconciliation with families and communities. Two groups of children who were abducted during the conflict are served by the project. One group is comprised of girls 17 years of age or younger; the other is made up of young women between the ages of 18 and 25. They are all encouraged to play an active role in activities and in decision-making.

For example, an activity that has met with success is a radio campaign run

by reintegrated adolescents. Radio broadcasts have helped to identify and locate girls who are still being held by their captors or those who were abducted and have since been released or have escaped. These ongoing efforts require collaboration with youth groups and with women and former child soldiers. The programme also encourages self-referrals at drop-in centres.

## **ASSESSING IMPACTS**

Some efforts have been made to evaluate the success of the DDR process. For example, child protection agencies involved in ICC management were mandated to carry out monitoring of every child in their centre every six weeks so that children were not overlooked. The monitoring required multi-disciplinary assessments of each child to chart his or her progress in core areas like health, education and family tracing. In some cases the monitoring was successful, but the system was patchy and not systematic. More monitoring and evaluation is needed.

Where the monitoring process was successful, agency staff came together with the children's teachers, nurses and tracing agents, providing a holistic view of the child's progress. It also provided children with an opportunity to express how they felt about life in the centres and what they would like to accomplish in the future. It allowed children to speak about their expectations and to learn what they could realistically expect from the reintegration process.

An overall assessment of the impact of children's participation in the DDR process has not been carried out. In fact, it would be difficult to assess their participation in the disarmament

exercise because there were few opportunities to involve children at that stage. However, once they arrived in an ICC, children participated through democratic representation in the centre's management. In most ICCs, Children's Councils were established and supported in order to foster rudimentary democratic principles and values, and to shift the 'gun-power' mentality that had taken hold during the war. This reduced the number of incidents of violent behaviour in ICCs and also helped to limit frictions in the community. Throughout the country, ICC managers and supervisors held rotational monthly meetings to share best practices and promising approaches regarding the management of the centres and methods for increasing the participation of children. Long-term reintegration activities also involved young people in planning and implementation, and a more thorough evaluation of that process would be useful.

The IRC is evaluating the impact of child protection agency intervention in the DDR process, including children's participation. The study covers the southern and eastern districts where IRC has served as lead implementing agency. This evaluation, currently underway, will contribute to lessons learned during the DDR process in Sierra Leone.

## **UNICEF'S ROLE**

UNICEF is the lead agency in Sierra Leone working for children in need of special protection, including the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers. The DDR process was led by the NCDDR, which was a special commission established by the government. UNICEF has collaborated throughout the DDR process with the NCDDR, the Ministry of Social Welfare

and with local and international child protection agencies. Selected care agencies have been funded by UNICEF to work in the demobilization camps. UNICEF played a key role because it was seen as an impartial partner by the fighting forces and, in partnership with child protection NGOs and the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), was able to help facilitate the release of children from armed groups.

The first and most urgent priority for UNICEF was to trace the families of children and reunite them. In addition, UNICEF, together with NCDDR, helped develop reintegration policies and procedures throughout the DDR process, for example, age verification and disarmament procedures for children so that they were separated from adults. Additional measures were put in place, together with child protection advisors, to determine children's ages through interviews and to assess the children's physical development. UNICEF also helped facilitate the transfer of children to ICCs and provided for their health, psychosocial, educational and pre-vocational needs. Foster families were found for those children who had lost their families. The reunification included counselling and other support to help the children return to their schools and communities.

In follow-up, UNICEF, together with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Child Protection Agencies, has helped develop guidelines for community-based reintegration. UNICEF continues, through the CEIP programme and other activities, to support long-term reintegration. For example, UNICEF's unique ability to act as a facilitating partner has made it possible for the agency to play a key role in initiating and coordinating the Sierra Leone CPN.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Children's participation in the DDR process is most appropriate during demobilization and reintegration. The disarmament phase is structured primarily as a military exercise and so participation is limited in that context.
- Children should be included in the planning, implementation, policy development and evaluation of reintegration activities, particularly schooling and vocational training, so that the programme is tailored to address their concerns.
- Counselling and guidance are needed to assist children when they are choosing their educational or vocational focus in the reintegration programme so that their choices reflect real opportunities within their communities.
- Measures must be put in place that reflect the specific experiences, needs and interests of girls throughout the demobilization and reintegration process in order to eliminate gender discrimination.
- Cultural and traditional activities to promote forgiveness, healing and reconciliation are especially valuable in helping children to become accepted back into their families and communities and can serve as an entry point for children's participation in community peace-building.
- Children who have been reunited and have reconciled with their families and communities can provide peer-to-peer support and encourage other former child soldiers to participate in reintegration. They understand the difficulties and know best how to advise other children.
- Effective interim care centres (ICCs) are community-based.

Reintegration support is far more successful when former child soldiers are integrated with their peers in schools and in community activities, rather than categorizing children

as former combatants and isolating them apart from the community.

- Sports and recreation are particularly effective in overcoming social barriers in the aftermath of war.