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Children in Emergency and Crisis Situations

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INTRODUCTION: OBJECTIVE OF THE DOCUMENT

Children are often among the prime beneficiaries of humanitarian aid in as far as they are disproportionately affected by crises. Their specific needs must be taken into account in every humanitarian action. The European Commission, through its Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO), has often underlined, particularly in its annual strategy documents, the importance it attaches to this group of beneficiaries.

The objective of the document is not to attempt to cover the whole of this – very extensive – problem of children in crises but more modestly to:

(1) present the general context of humanitarian actions in favour of children and to underline their special vulnerability in crises, the various forms of this vulnerability and the risks with which they are confronted in unsettled situations.

(2) define a general framework for community humanitarian actions covering three major problems which particularly concern children in crisis situations and which are the subject of numerous debates and studies at international level: separated and non-accompanied children, child soldiers and education in emergencies. This general framework, which sets out what can be done, will be implemented according to the specificities of each crisis situation taking into account the available resources and the presence of competent partners in the field. The document also stresses certain risks which must be taken into consideration and the issue of the transition towards stabilisation and longer term development instruments.

(3) provide, through recommendations made, a basis for reflection and examples of good practice for Member States to use in their bilateral humanitarian actions.

1. DEFINITION AND FRAMEWORK OF ACTIVITIES

The Convention on the Rights of the Child[1] defines a child as "every human being below the age of eighteen years" (Art. 1). The Convention calls for child protection and non-discrimination (Art. 2), for the provision of his essential needs as well as those required for his development (Art. 6). The best interests of the child shall always be a primary consideration (Art. 3) and the child has the right to freely express his views on anything concerning him (Art. 12).

The Charter for Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU) confirms, in its Article 24 on the rights of the child, these key principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

[1] Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989, entered into force on 2 September 1990.

Other international legal instruments deal with children in conflict situation, in particular the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts[2], the Geneva Convention IV of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in time of war[3], the Protocols I + II Additional to the Geneva Convention of 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of Armed Conflicts[4], all of which recognise specific needs of protection for children, together with the Statute of the International Criminal Court which defines as a war crime the enrolment of children under the age of 15 in national armed forces or the use of them as active participants in hostilities[5]. One could also cite ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour (1999).

At the European level, the Commission, the Council and the Parliament all attach great importance to the question of children in general and to children affected by crises in particular. Thus, in December 2003, after a wide-ranging consultation, the EU Council adopted guidelines for children in armed conflicts[6]. Modalities for implementing those guidelines were adopted in April 2006.

In July 2006, the Commission adopted a Communication entitled "Towards a European Strategy on the Rights of the Child"[7], which seeks to promote the respect of the rights of the child in all of the Community's policies and actions, both internal and external. In the area of external relations, the promotion and respect of the rights of the child are one of the priorities of the new instrument for democracy and human rights. Finally, an action plan on children in external relations is being prepared by the different responsible services.

Children are at the very heart of the Commission's humanitarian mandate which is to support "*...operations on a non-discriminatory basis to help people in third countries, particularly the most vulnerable among them, and as a priority those in developing countries, victims of natural disasters, man-made crises, such as wars and outbreaks of fighting…".*[8]

Humanitarian aid for children must guarantee both their survival (food, health, water and sanitation) and provide them, along with other providers as one gradually emerges from the crisis, with a protective environment which allows them to pursue their physical, emotional and mental development. This aid is necessary to protect their future and enable them to contribute to the reconstruction of their country once the crisis has passed.

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[2] Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, entered into force on 12 February 2002.

[3] Geneva Convention IV relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in time of war, 12 August 1949

[4] Protocols I + II Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of Armed Conflicts, adopted on 8 June 1977 and entered into force on 7 December 1978.

[5] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 8 (War crimes) 2 (b) (xxvi) Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities, entered into force on 1 July 2002.

[6] EU Guidelines on children in armed conflicts, Council Document 15634/03 and Implementation Strategy for the Guidelines on Children and Armed conflict (doc. 8285/06).

[7] COM(2006)367 final

[8] Council Regulation (EC) 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 on humanitarian aid, Article 1.

DG ECHO also supports UNICEF in its strengthening of the capacities of the humanitarian community in the area of protection of children in emergency situations by the development of various tools (guidelines, training modules, audio-visual material etc).

2. RISKS AND VULNERABILITY OF CHILDREN IN EMERGENCY AND CRISIS SITUATIONS

The majority of international legal instruments concerns children in armed conflicts, but children are also disproportionately affected by natural disasters. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has estimated that between 1991 and 2000, 242 million people have been affected by conflicts and natural disasters each year: of this total some 77 million were children under the age of 15. Of these 77 million children, 10 million were affected by a conflict and the rest by natural disasters.

Children are the part of the population most affected by humanitarian crises. They are both particularly vulnerable and particularly exposed, often without resources of their own or protection. They suffer disproportionately from malnourishment and illness which leads to a high mortality rate. They also form a large proportion of anti-personnel mine victims.

Today 90% of the victims of conflicts are civilians of which half are children under 18[9]. It is estimated that during the last decade conflicts have cost the lives of 2 million children and that a further 6 million have been maimed.

For example in Darfur, some 2 million people have had to leave their homes and live in camps for the displaced. More than half of them are children under 18, and of those 320,000 are under 5 (UNICEF 2005).

Children are easy prey for recruitment by armed groups for sexual exploitation, forced labour and international trafficking. They are frequently victims of violence and sexual abuse.

In addition to the dangers to which they are directly exposed there is also, in complex crises, the weakening or destruction of traditional structures of protection and support (family and community structures). Children can also find themselves separated from their family during a crisis, leaving them extremely vulnerable.

Long-lasting crises can have a devastating effect on children growing up in such a situation, creating "lost generations" which risk extending the conflict and perpetuating violence and instability, since children will have known only violence and crises.

[9] Save the Children 2005

Children have needs which must be differentiated according to their specific circumstances: (disabled, HIV positive, displaced etc) and age. Thus the needs of adolescents, sometimes already responsible for a family, are very different from those of a young child. Child heads of family and child mothers are among the most vulnerable. It is important to analyse the specific risks which threaten each category of child in a particular context (epidemic, malnutrition, exploitation, abandonment, recruitment by armed groups etc) in order to better meet their needs and improve the protection of children in a crisis.

Disability, whether it predated the crisis or is a result of it, is an aggravating factor. The risk of injury or disability during a natural disaster or conflict is much higher among children, and the vulnerability of the disabled children is exacerbated. Disabled children risk being left on the side at a time of crisis.

Girls are particularly exposed to the different forms of violence, domestic and sexual, in conflict areas, in displaced and refugee camps, or following a natural disaster. Globally, periods of conflict, with the destruction of family and community structures which they bring about, are always accompanied by an increase in violence, particularly towards women and girls. Those responsible are not always members of armed groups, but also people from their community or family or even people supposed to be protecting them (international armed forces, people in charge of supplying or protecting the camps etc).

Finally, one must stress that humanitarian aid programmes which meet the specific needs of children must also take into account the needs of the mothers, since their situation generally has a direct impact on the physical and psychological well being of the children. This is particularly the case for questions of nutrition and health: reproductive health and support during lactation are examples of activities designed for the mothers which also have a direct and real effect on the well being of the children.

3. THREE SPECIFIC PROBLEMS: SEPARATED AND UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN, CHILD SOLDIERS AND EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

Since children are generally an important part of the victims of a crisis, each humanitarian action must take into consideration their specific needs, differentiated according to their age and situation. This must be a systematic approach in the sectoral interventions (mainstreaming). It is a fact that certain humanitarian interventions, like those linked to nutrition almost exclusively and those in the health sector very largely, particularly concern children.

Certain areas and types of actions specifically concern children. These specific actions concern three major problems, dealt with in the following sections:

(1) the taking care of separated or unaccompanied children. The experiences of the tsunami, the Pakistan earthquake and many conflict situations in Africa, have shown that much remains to be done here;

(2) the demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers. This has just been the object of a strong international political commitment, especially with the adoption of the "Paris Principles" and new guidelines;

(3) education in emergencies, a subject more and more discussed and to which the humanitarian community attaches growing importance.

3.1. Separated[10] and unaccompanied[11] children

In both natural and complex crises, children become separated from their parents or other care-givers. The United Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that unaccompanied children are generally between 2% and 5% of a refugee population. There are multiple reasons for the separation, which can occur either accidentally during flight or evacuation, or deliberately, when the parents abandon their child or give him to a third person or institution thinking that they will have a higher chance to survive or benefit from assistance. Parents can send their children to an asylum country to protect them, when they themselves remain in situ, or, in the reverse situation, leave their children in the host country while they return to their country of origin. Some children leave their family surroundings of their own will, others are orphans: some become street children.

Separation brutally deprives children of their emotional and material support and renders them highly vulnerable. Separated children require heightened attention, particularly the very young and the girls, who are at higher risk of being left to one side.

As part of its programme to increase capacity in the area of child protection in emergency situations, the Commission, through DG ECHO, has contributed to the drawing up of *"The lost ones: emergency care and family tracing for separated children from birth to 5 years"*, a document which deals with the loss of identity of very young children in emergency situations, with their being taken into care and their development, and with the tracing and verification of family links.

Preventing separation

Separation can often be avoided, even in cases of extreme emergency, if certain preventive measures are put into place. For this it is necessary to identify likely or possible causes of separation, as well as the groups most at risk. Single parent families, those where the head of household is a child, as well as disabled or ill children must be carefully monitored since the risk of abandonment is greater.

[10] Children separated are separated from both their parents (father and mother) or from their previous legal or customary primary care-giver; they are not necessarily separated from other members of their family. (Main inter-agency principles on children separated from their family or unaccompanied, page 13).

[11] Unaccompanied children (sometimes called "unaccompanied minors" are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by any other adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. (same source).

Families must be made aware of the measures to take in a crisis situation to avoid separation and to facilitate reunification. This includes teaching children their name, their address and their background, or making the youngest wear an identity badge. They must be made aware of the importance of taking their identity documents with them if they have to leave home. These points should be systematically incorporated into natural disaster preparedness programmes.

The establishment of community systems, even informal, to protect children, can be an effective contribution towards preventing separation during and after a crisis.

In the event of an evacuation, children should, as far as possible, be evacuated with their family. Families should receive sufficient aid to meet their needs.

The evacuation of children for medical or security reasons should be done to a place as close as possible to their home or family. All information necessary to identify the child must be collected before the evacuation, particularly in the case of the youngest. This basic precaution is often forgotten in natural disasters when numerous injured have to be evacuated.

Equally, during the return of the refugees or displaced to their country or region of origin, particular measures must be taken and one must make sure that the parents do not leave their children behind. Families must be registered together for the return, but this is not always sufficiently taken into account. Currently, this is one of the problems of the Burundi and Congolese refugees in Tanzania.

Finally, humanitarian actors must be careful that their actions do not, in one way or the other, encourage a separation (for example by creating reception centres for children, thereby encouraging parents to leave their children so that they can benefit from the facilities offered by the centre).

Tracing and reestablishment of family links

In most cases, separated children have actual parents or relatives who would like to look after them. In emergency situations, separated and unaccompanied children must be identified and registered as quickly as possible for their own protection, to meet their needs (there is a high chance that they cannot reach the basic services on their own) and to start tracing their family. One must however, avoid stigmatising the children or creating false hopes. Such children must be looked for in hospitals, feeding centres, orphanages and host families.

The Commission, through DG ECHO, helps such children in several contexts, notably through the tracing and reunification of families in the framework of population movements linked to the conflicts in Africa (West Africa, Burundi, Tanzania) or to the Tsunami in Asia (Aceh).

Priority must be given to the youngest children who are less able to give full information about themselves and who risk quickly forgetting what information they do know.

The lack of a registry of births has severe consequences when children become separated. Globally, one child in three is not registered at birth, many only being registered much later when they begin school for example. Such a child risks losing its identity if it becomes separated. Humanitarian actors must be careful to ensure that as far as possible births are registered during emergencies.

Searching for family links seeks to find the parents of separated children or children of whom the parents have no news, with the aim of reuniting the family. The ICRC has the mandate to restore family links and has developed various activities in this field.

A good coordination and cooperation between organisations tasked with the process is crucial but is often lacking. Such organisations must draw up a common approach at the very beginning of the crisis, in particular by using a standard registration form, which is still too rarely the case. This is all the more necessary since the search activities often cover several countries.

As part of a project of capacity building in the area of child protection with UNICEF, the Commission, through DG ECHO, is supporting the development and use of a standard data base common to UNICEF, Save the Children and IRC[12] and compatible with that of the ICRC, to be used by all the organisations involved. This data base has been used in the framework of a regional child protection project funded by DG ECHO in West Africa (Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone).

Positive examples are nevertheless still very limited and efforts must be continued to spread the use of good practice and improve the impact of family tracing and reunification projects.

Preferably, the child will be reunited with its parents, or, failing this, with other members of its family. In general, if no member of the wider family can be identified, the placement of the child in a host family in the original community is better to a placement in an institution, which can only be encouraged as a solution of last resort.

The reunification must be carefully prepared and follow up measures put in place, preferably through local systems of child protection or community structures.

Finally, specific measures must be foreseen for older children, who have led an independent existence during the emergency and who do not wish to return to their family or to their community.

[12] International Rescue Committee, an NGO deeply involved in child protection.

AIDS orphans

The number of AIDS orphans is rapidly growing, particularly in Africa. According to UNICEF, 15 million children have lost their father, their mother or both parents to AIDS worldwide, of which more than 12 million are in sub-Saharan Africa[13]. Between now and 2010, their number should exceed 25 million. Many adolescents therefore find themselves head of the family and have to look after the needs of their brothers and sisters, as well as sometimes their ill parent(s).

The Commission, through DG ECHO, is helping children who are AIDS orphans, particularly in Zimbabwe which has 1.4 million orphans, 75% due to AIDS. These actions include the supply of basic necessities (including domestic utensils) as well as seeds and fertilisers, an education campaign about AIDS, the training and mobilisation of the community to look after AIDS orphans, the establishment of support groups for orphans in each district, etc.

If the care of AIDS orphans, which requires a structural action for the long term at national level, is not part of humanitarian aid, this group must nevertheless be taken into account in a particular way at times of humanitarian actions in the countries concerned. The wider family, which previously provided a safety net, is often no longer in a position to help these children. Actions designed to help them acquire a certain self-sufficiency (particularly food security) may be necessary.

The prevention of the transmission of the virus by an awareness campaign should also systematically form part of the help to AIDS orphans. It can be integrated into the health or education programmes, for example.

3.2. Child soldiers[14]

Actions for the demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants are not normally part of humanitarian actions, except those in favour of children during the conflict or immediately at the end of hostilities.

Human Rights Watch estimates that 250,000 – 300,000 child soldiers – boys and girls – are involved in more than 20 conflicts around the world[15]. They are estimated at 14,000 in Colombia, while in Somalia 200,000 children would have carried arms or formed part of the militia since the collapse of the government in 1991[16]. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, children represented up to 40% of some of the

[13] "Children, the hidden face of AIDS", UNAIDS/UNICEF, October 2005, p. 6.

[14] The exact terminology accepted internationally is "a child associated with an armed force or armed group". The definition of this is "Any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys or girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities". Paris Principles – Principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces and groups, February 2007, § 2.1."

[15] http://hrw.org/campaigns/crp/index.htm

[16] UNICEF 2006

armed groups in the east of the country in 2003[17]. In Sri Lanka, 43% of the children involved in the conflict are girls[18]. In Burma (Myanmar) 70,000 children are serving in the national army, some 20% of the total, to which one must add 5,000 – 7,000 children in the various armed opposition groups[19].

Children are used as fighters, messengers, porters or cooks, and to provide sexual services. Some are recruited by force or kidnapped, others enlist to escape poverty, ill-treatment and discrimination, or to avenge themselves for acts of violence committed against them or their family.

Children have a greater risk of becoming child soldiers if they are separated from their family, have left home, live in combat zones or have little education. They may well join the ranks of the armed groups as their sole method of subsistence.

Population movements open children to ever greater risks of recruitment. Although refugee camps are supposed to be zones of protection, UNHCR considers the recruitment of children inside the camps to be a serious problem, as noted in Chad, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Thailand.

The Commission, through DG ECHO, is funding or has funded programmes for former child soldiers, particularly in West Africa and Uganda.

In Ivory Coast and Liberia, DG ECHO provided psycho-social support aid, short-term professional training, catch up courses to return to school and awareness campaigns in the community to make the reintegration of the children easier and to prevent any re-recruitment.

In Uganda, the Community's humanitarian funding supported the creation of reception centres offering different activities, including family reunification programmes and short professional training courses, to children who had been associated with the armed forces, including child mothers.

The Cape Town Principles[20] adopted in 1997 defined a first group of recommendations for the prevention of recruitment, the demobilisation and social reintegration of child soldiers in Africa. They have been widely used in Africa and have had an important role in the acceptance of a broad definition of the concept of child soldiers, in particular by including girls and children with a non-combatant role

[17] Save the Children 2005
[18] UNICEF 2006
[19] Human Rights Watch. See also "Despite Promises: Child Soldiers in Burma's SPDC Armed Forces", Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB), September 2006
[20] The Cape Town Principles and best practices on the prevention of recruitment of children into the armed forces, and on Demobilisation and social reintegration of child soldiers in Africa, adopted in Cape Town in April 1997 by the working groups of NGOs on the Convention of the Rights of the Child and UNICEF. This document includes recommendations (for the governments and communities of the countries affected by this problem) on ways to end this violation of a child's right.

(thus equally those who have not borne arms). The non-obligatory nature of these principles has nevertheless proved to be a heavy limiting factor in their effectiveness.

On the initiative of UNICEF, with financial support from the Commission through the thematic funding of DG ECHO, and with the participation of a large number of actors, these principles have just been revised to take into account the lessons of the many experiences of the last decade, to include the new international legal norms and to extend their area of application beyond Africa to the whole world. They are now called the "Paris Principles – The principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups" – February 2007.

A wide political support was given to these new guiding principles during a ministerial conference held in Paris in February 2007 where 59 countries (including Chad, Colombia, DRC, Nepal, Sudan, Sri Lanka and Uganda, in all of which children are used as soldiers) adopted the "Paris commitments", 20 commitments aimed at ending the phenomena, protecting children, fighting against impunity, welcoming the updating of the Cape Town Principles and committing themselves to following the Paris Principles.

The European Commission also brought its political support to the Paris Principles and committed itself to implementing them, through its different tools, in its programmes for demobilisation and reintegration of the children.

The Commission will include the recommendations of the Paris Principles - in particular those aspects concerning humanitarian aid – in its actions in favour of child soldiers and will ask its implementing partners to conform to them as well.

In a similar vein, the European Commission and the Council adopted a joint document in December 2006 "The European concept for support to the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of Former Combatants in Third Countries", which includes several paragraphs concerning child soldiers and makes reference to the revision of the Cape Town Principles.

The following sections follow up certain elements of the Paris Principles which are particularly relevant for the humanitarian actions of DG ECHO.

Prevention of recruitment

Prevention is normally the responsibility of national governments, who have to apply the corresponding international norms. However, humanitarian actors may have a essential role to play in a conflict situation. This implies the need to understand and respond to the many complex reasons for the recruitment and use of children. Alternatives must be offered to the children at risk, including adolescents. Education and training may allow them access to a livelihood and represent effective ways of protecting children (see section 3.3.). The family and the community often, however, provide the best protection for children. Programmes for prevention must therefore include the local community, the parents and the children themselves.

The Commission, through DG ECHO, is financing programmes of protection and prevention of recruitment of children, particularly in Colombia, with, inter alia, informal education activities (which allow young people who have missed several years of schooling to bring them back to their level and subsequently go back to the formal education system) and activities at community level.

Given the cyclical nature of many conflicts, children who leave armed groups are often recruited again, either in their own or neighbouring countries. This has been particularly noted in West Africa – where children were demobilised, particularly thanks to the support of the Commission, and then recruited again in Ivory Coast - or in the Great Lakes region. In such circumstances a regional approach is necessary to prevent such re-recruitments, together with a monitoring of the children who have been demobilised. In order to reduce the risk of re-recruitment, it is essential to ensure that the link between the child and the armed groups has been effectively broken and that the child is no longer, in one way or another, under the influence of the group or of one of its commanders.

The prevention of recruitment of child soldiers must be integrated much more systematically into humanitarian aid programmes in complex crisis when there is a risk of recruitment. Particular attention must be paid to the camps of refugees and displaced, where the children are particularly susceptible to recruitment.

Demobilisation and Reintegration of Child Soldiers

Demobilisation of children should be carried out at any time, even if possible during the conflict, as soon as the presence of children in the armed forces is confirmed. It must not be dependent on, nor linked in any way to the progress of a peace process or a formal DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration) process. Globally the process of demobilisation of children must be completely separated from that of adults in order to avoid that children are a bargaining chip in the political process and the discussions on the make-up of the future armed and security forces.

Since they are often present throughout the conflict, humanitarian actors have a particular responsibility for the demobilisation of children in such situations.

Programmes for the demobilisation and reintegration must meet the needs of all the children who are demobilised, whether this has happened through a formal procedure or whether they left the armed forces of their own accord (self-demobilisation). They must ensure that all the children who want it, have access to the programmes, which can entail information and sensitisation campaigns in the armed groups and families, children and communities. Girls, often "invisible", must benefit from particular attention (see following point).

After the demobilisation, the children must be able to be reunited as quickly as possible with their family, or failing that, with a host family inside their community,

avoiding as far as possible any placing in an institution. Prior work with the family or community is often necessary for them to accept to take back the child.

In order to avoid either stigmatisation or to give the impression that these children are in a way being rewarded for having been part of armed groups, the reintegration programmes must be open to all vulnerable children in the community targeted by the programme or to all these affected by the conflict, whether or not they have been associated with an armed group. This aspect is fundamental to ensure acceptance of former child soldiers and reconciliation in the community.

The reintegration programmes must emphasise the participation of the family and the entire community by an inclusive approach. In particular, child protection organisations agree that children should not receive money for becoming demobilised but that support should be given to the family and community in a way designed to help reintegration and reconciliation. Despite the recommendation of the child protection agencies, the DDR process for children in Liberia included an allocation of money to children (adolescents). Many adolescents thus received a monthly sum higher than the salary of their teachers, and in addition had their fees and scholastic material paid.

Psycho-social support must also be given, through all the stages of release and reintegration, to the children, their family and the community in order to help them face up to the obstacles which impede them finding themselves a role and normal social relations[21]. Youth groups, children's clubs or other community support groups can play a very important role.

Education, professional training and any gaining of skills which allows the child to meet his needs or contribute to the subsistence of his family are often essential, particularly to avoid the return of the children to the armed groups given the lack of any better option.

Educational activities must also take into account the age and experience of the child, and include elements which will contribute to his psycho-social well-being and self-esteem. Professional training must meet the basic needs of the market and not train too many young people with the same skills – seamstresses, hairdressers, mechanics etc – when the need for these skills is limited. This is one of the main difficulties of reintegration programmes, which often fail to offer skills easily usable in the labour market. Moreover, the serious economic difficulties in post-conflict countries are often an obstacle to the employment of young people trained in this way.

Finally, adolescents often have specific needs and expectations in the framework of reintegration programmes and do not necessarily want to be associated with programmes aimed at children, particularly when they have behaved as adults when part of an armed group. They may require specific programmes with, perhaps,

[21] See "Inter-agency Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (IASC, June 2007)

accelerated educational courses allowing them to catch up the years of missed school, and with emphasis on the development of self sufficiency.

Girls associated with armed forces and groups

Save the Children estimates that 40% of children associated with armed forces and groups, i.e. some 120,000, are girls[22]. The use of girls has been confirmed in Colombia, DRC, East Timor, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Uganda and West Africa. There are some 12,500 in DRC. However, girls are generally less visible and up to now have hardly benefited from demobilisation and reintegration programmes for child soldiers (they represent only a few percent of the beneficiaries), either because the commanders refuse to let them go, considering them to be their "wives", or because they are reluctant to be identified for fear of being stigmatised. They can also think that there is no other real alternative way of life for them beyond the armed group. In the majority of cases, no one knows what has happened after a DDR process to the large majority of girls associated with the armed groups.

In order to encourage their participation, the release programmes must meet the specific needs of girls, notably with the presence of female helpers, secure lodging in the reception and transit sites, and specific measures to guarantee their safety and protection with particular support for child mothers and their children.

Intensive dialogue and mediation are often necessary to support the reintegration of girl soldiers in their community and their family. Ways must be found to take away the stigmatisms. The community may also need support to adapt itself to the behaviour and expectations of these girls which do not follow the traditional mould. Not all the girls who have been demobilised want to return to their community: in such cases aid must still be provided to ensure that they can access education, training and means of a livelihood.

The majority of girl soldiers – whatever role they have played inside the armed group – have been abused sexually. It is not uncommon that a commander takes several girls as "wives". Many have children. This makes their acceptance and return to their community even more difficult. The young mother who has been demobilised must often looks after herself and her children alone, with no support from a community which rejects them, thereby forcing some to turn to prostitution, further adding to their marginalisation. Humanitarian actors must pay particular attention to these mothers and their children.

Generally, extreme sensitivity is necessary when one is seeking to identify and then help girls associated with armed groups, in order not to further stigmatise them and not to aggravate their situation.

[22] Forgotten casualties of war, Girls in armed conflicts; Save the Children

The importance of continuing these interventions on a long term basis

The community's humanitarian funding can only help the demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers for a short period of time, during the conflict or immediately after the end of hostilities. However, the reintegration of children affected by the conflict is a long and exacting task which requires strong involvement for several years. An effective reintegration is long and costly and must be adapted to the specific needs of each community.

It is therefore fundamental for the success of the process that the development actors rapidly ensure a handover. An interruption in the support given to these children can have a devastating effect, encouraging them to re-enlist or to turn to other illegal activities (trafficking, gangs…), which can have a negative effect on the stability of the country.

Up to now, emphasis has been placed more on the military aspects in the DDR process, with large sums for the disarmament and demobilisation phases, but without ensuring the necessary financial means for the reintegration phase.

In this kind of activity, it is important that there be coordination as early as possible with actors who may continue the reintegration programmes in the middle and long term (World Bank, UN agencies, other Commission services, etc).

3.3. Education

"We had to leave behind all of our possessions. The only thing we could bring with us is what we have in our heads, what we have been taught – our education. Education is the only thing that cannot be taken from us". A refugee woman from Darfur, 2004[23].

Education - or rather educational activities since in an emergency there is rarely formal education following a set curriculum – is often not perceived as an area for humanitarian actors. Crises, and particularly complex crises, which often last several years, nevertheless have a devastating effect on the schooling of children, sometimes creating real "lost generations", which have only known crises and violence and which have been unable to follow any form of schooling. The ability of these children once they have become adults, to contribute to the reconstruction and development of their country is heavily limited and these young people can become a source of insecurity and violence for their country, or for their host country if they are refugees. Education during a crisis allows them to keep their dignity and to continue to develop their social and human value.

[23] Cited in "Standards put to the test: Implementing the INEE Minimum standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction", HPN network paper number 57, December 2006

Moreover, education can prove an effective means of protecting children in a period of crisis and of reducing its negative effects on their physical, psychological, social and emotional development.

Taking children into educational structures also frees up time for the mother to undertake other tasks which can help to improve the child's well-being – collecting water, preparing meals, taking another child to a health centre, etc.

Given these facts, more and more organisations are calling on the humanitarian actors to commit themselves to providing education in emergency and crisis situations[24]. De facto, at times of conflict when the country's education structures no longer function and children no longer have the possibility of going to school, humanitarian aid can be the sole instrument providing children, and particularly the most vulnerable, access to some educational activities.

Numerous evaluations of the needs of displaced and refugee populations and communities have specifically identified education and schooling as a priority need for their community. Even during a severe crisis, beneficiaries often identify the school as a priority need. Requests for education often exceed those for food, water, medicines or shelter. This is often forgotten when the programmes are drawn up[25].

Humanitarian actors should therefore recognise the importance of education in emergency and crisis situation and be ready to intervene in the sector when it appears that no other actor (national or local authorities, long term aid providers) has the means or possibility of intervening.

If humanitarian aid can indeed have a role to play, one must, nevertheless, be aware of the limits to which humanitarian aid can go, given the nature of humanitarian aid itself.

Education and child protection

In a crisis situation, the school or structured educational activities represent a haven of normality where children can find a routine. This aspect is very important to limit the traumas linked to the crisis and to help the children face up to the situation, thereby giving education in emergencies an important psycho-social dimension. As far as possible, this should be strengthened by training the school staff in the psycho-social aspects so that they can better help and work with the children. In this context, protected play areas and child-friendly spaces where children and their family can gather for recreational, cultural and sporting activities also play a very important role.

[24] See particularly the world-wide campaigns of the "Save the Children Alliance: "Rewrite the future – Education for children in conflict-affected countries", 2006

[25] See "Standards put to the test: Implementing the INEE Minimum standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction", HPN network paper number 57, December 2006, page 2

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the Commission, through DG ECHO, is funding psycho-social support programmes through schools. The proposed activities allow the children to express their experiences and feelings in the face of the violence which they meet, while at the same time helping them to develop ways of protecting themselves against it. The teachers also receive a basic training in this field and activities encouraging meetings with parents within the framework of the school are organised.

School can be an effective way of protecting children, particularly in a complex emergency: protection against being recruited into an armed group or against any other form of violence, abuse or exploitation, particularly by labour. For this protection to be really effective, school should be accessible to everybody in the targeted community, and in particular to the vulnerable and marginalised children. Particular attention must be paid to children who are head of the family, separated or disabled, child mothers and children who have been victims of violence such as - sexual violence as well as to child soldiers. Here specific measures must be foreseen, such as certain flexibility in organising the timetable in order to let the children keep up with an economic activity or with looking after their family, or providing child-minding services to allow child mothers attend their classes. Equally for certain categories of children, such as adolescents outside the educational system or former child soldiers, some form of informal education providing professional qualifications at an accelerated rhythm with specially designed content can be created to best meet their needs.

An exact analysis of children's needs and the dangers which they face as well as the obstacles to their schooling is necessary for a programme of education to be an effective tool in protecting children. The involvement and the active contribution of the children themselves, the community and, if possible, the local authorities is a very important element in programmes of education in emergencies. In crises where the social fabric has remained relatively intact, one can see that humanitarian initiatives supporting schooling are often continued afterwards by the parents and the community in its wider sense.

The school as a place of awareness-raising and prevention

The school can be the place to raise the awareness of children to a large number of questions, of which some are vital in a crisis situation. It can bring knowledge and skills which will allow them to better face up to the crisis. Thus, in areas where many anti-personnel mines or other ordinance have been planted, school can provide a way of making children aware of the risks of this material, thereby limiting the number of victims (even if the mere fact of going to school can be a risk in itself). It is the same for health education – particularly reproductive health – and hygiene in order to limit the rates of certain illnesses and prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS.

Within the framework of the school, the child can also be made aware of the risk of recruitment by armed groups as well as of the real dangers which that entails once

one goes beyond certain aspects which can appear attractive – power, status, economic independence.

In the Ivory Coast, the Commission, through DG ECHO, has supported recreational and educational activities in schools in order to make both the children and the community aware of the risks of enlistment. They have allowed the children to get back into the academic framework or into active life by providing training in basic trades: carpentry, building, fashion, hairdressing etc.

If access to the most vulnerable children is assured, school, whether it be formal or informal, can be a privileged place to provide follow-up to children in the psycho-social, nutritional and sanitary areas. School feeding programmes can draw vulnerable children into the school and contribute to the improvement of their health. Moreover, in environments where food security is precarious, there is a considerable positive effect on the budget of vulnerable households.

School can also be a special area to make children aware of how to prepare for natural disasters, to teach them how to react in an appropriate and organised way and how to take certain precautionary measures. The multiple effects in communities where children are taught in this way are both significant and sustainable.

As part of its disaster preparedness programmes in Asia and Latin America (DIPECHO), the Commission, through DG ECHO, is financing specific educational activities aimed at making teachers and/or pupils aware of how to prepare for and prevent natural disasters, notably with simulation exercises.

Finally, thanks to school or education activities, children can be trained in human rights, aggression and conflict management, civic and peace education, which should allow them to have hope for the future and to play a positive role in the post-crisis reconstruction.

Security at school and in the school

Schools are, however, not always places of safety, and in many countries (Liberia, Nepal, etc) schools have been attacked by armed groups to bring about the forced enlistment of children. Schools are also regularly used as temporary barracks by combatants during a conflict. Finally, inside the school itself, violence can be endemic, particularly towards girls, where good marks can be given in exchange for sexual favours[26]. Much work is therefore necessary to guarantee security at the school and its surrounding areas, as well as on the paths leading to the school. The school staff must also be trained so that corporal punishment, violence and abuse are

[26]"Help us help ourselves: education in the conflict and post-conflict transition in Liberia", Women's Commission for refugee women & children, March 2006; www.womenscommission.org.

banned. A certain number of additional measures are also necessary for this, such as separate latrines for girls and the presence of women in the school staff, both teaching and non-teaching. The community as a whole, and, if possible, the local authorities must help make the school a secure place.

Education in the refugee and displaced camps

In the refugee and displaced camps, it is not uncommon for the international community to provide all the basic services including education. Indeed there is often no alternative for the children. UNHCR estimates that 30% of refugee children do not go to school regularly. When the crisis lasts several years, secondary education needs for children who have grown up in the camps become apparent, thus posing further problems for the humanitarian actors. There can often be a dilemma between providing secondary education for the children or risking unoccupied children turning their hand to the illicit activities which are often present in or around the camps (drugs, arms, prostitution) or joining armed groups.

The Commission, through DG ECHO, has supported education in various refugee camps, notably in Burundi and Tanzania, by constructing or refurbishing classrooms, supplying teaching material and furniture, making and distributing school uniforms and by training teachers.

A particular problem is that education in the refugee camps can be a deterrent to the return to the country of origin. Indeed, the education offered in the camps, largely provided by the international community, can be better than that in the country of origin, thereby making parents with children in education unwilling to return, even though all other necessary conditions for the return are met, thereby postponing the closing of the camps. This phenomenon was noticed in the return of the Burundi refugees from Tanzania. The problem is made worse by the host countries sometimes imposing the use of their own language and curricula for the teaching in the camps to the detriment of the mother tongue of the refugees, thereby making a reinsertion into the educational system of the native country difficult, if not impossible. The question of recognition of diplomas in the country of origin as well as the return of the teachers is also often problematic. It is essential that the development actors of the international community invest heavily in the educational system of the country of origin to favorise return as a lasting solution for the refugees.

Education in emergencies following a natural disaster

After a natural disaster, humanitarian actions in the field of education can help a lot to reduce the disruptive effects of the event, reduce the trauma felt by the children and avoid that people profit from the chaos to indulge in exploitation or traffic of children.

In such circumstances, it is important that the child can return as soon as possible to an environment and a rhythm as close as possible to his daily routine where the school plays a central role. It will therefore most frequently be a question of short term projects with the setting up of temporary schools, for instance in tents, while

waiting for the rebuilding or refurbishment of the scholastic infrastructure. The school, together with games and recreational activities, provide an important psycho-social support to children and increase their resilience.

After the tsunami in South East Asia, the Commission, through DG ECHO, financed educational activities in Aceh, including a psycho-social and protection aspect.

In these contexts, it is important to associate the authorities and the local communities and to give way as soon as possible to the formal education system. In certain cases, as after the Pakistan earthquake of October 2005, the presence of development actors in the education field meant that a humanitarian intervention in this field by the European Commission was not needed.

Transfer of activities in the education field to medium and long term actors

One must nevertheless avoid the risk that humanitarian actors create a system parallel to the national one to parry a collapse or paralysis in the educational system. This could even lead the State to abrogate its responsibilities to provide universal access to primary education, particularly when humanitarian programmes are targeting religious or ethnic minorities, displaced or refugees – for instance where there are no camps – or those in remote areas. Education in emergency programmes must therefore use existing educational system as much as possible, rather than create separate structures. This must, however, be qualified in refugee camps, particularly when one wants to provide an education in the children's mother tongue. Once again, however, there is the problem of recognition of diplomas.

Overall, humanitarian actors must be vigilant and not get involved in structural actions which are the responsibility of longer term actors and the national and local authorities. Very early cooperation with the local or national authorities and the other donors, particularly in the development field, is therefore necessary and, in the area of education in emergencies, a convergence with the national education system must always be sought.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Even if they do not specifically target them, all humanitarian programmes must pay particular attention to the specific and differentiated needs of children, who are part of the most vulnerable beneficiaries. A "do no harm" approach must be systematically followed to avoid an unsought negative impact of certain operations on children.

In addition, some actions specifically for the benefit of children should be strengthened. The Commission will develop more operational recommendations for its humanitarian activities in the three areas discussed in this document.

However, children who have been protected and helped by humanitarian programmes do not always receive such assistance afterwards, for instance once they have returned to their region of origin, which leaves them in a particularly vulnerable state. For instance protection programmes often stop abruptly with the withdrawal of the humanitarian actors from the post conflict situation, e.g. Sierra Leone. It is therefore necessary to ensure a follow up of programmes for vulnerable children affected by the crises in stabilisation, rehabilitation and development programmes. This dimension has often been hidden in the discussions about the transition between relief, rehabilitation and development which are more focused on specific sectors – such as health, food aid, water and sanitation.

The action plan for children currently being prepared by the external relations services provides a good opportunity for this. Equally, the Commission services must seek out the opportunities offered by external relations' new financial instruments to better respond to the rights and needs of children in the long term, once the humanitarian intervention is over, thereby fulfilling its political commitments.

ANNEX

Reference documents

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