



**Save the Children**  
UK

**DISCUSSION PAPER**

# **From Camp to Community: Liberia study on exploitation of children**

*Discussion paper on children's vulnerability to exploitation and abuse during the delivery of assistance in Liberia based on field studies carried out by Save the Children UK in Liberia*

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# CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	4
Abbreviations	4
Executive summary	5
Introduction	7
Methodology	8
Study findings	9
Conclusion	17
Recommendations	18

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Members of the field team from the Liberian office of Save the Children UK put in a great deal of thought, time and effort into collecting the information that is presented in this document. It was often distressing to hear the accounts of people, but the team conducted the interviews with a sympathy and understanding that was reflected in the willingness of people to speak about this difficult and sensitive topic. Several of the respondents expressed gratitude for being given the opportunity to air their concerns about the sexual exploitation of their children.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CMT/CMC: Camp Management Team/Camp Management Committee

DPKO: Department of Peace-Keeping Operations

FGD: Focus group discussion

IDI: In-depth interview

IDP: Internally displaced person

IASC: Inter-Agency Standing Committee

INGO: International non-governmental organisation

LRRRC: Liberian Refugee Resettlement and Repatriation Commission (Government of Liberia agency)

NFI: Non-food item

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

SRSG CAAC: Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children Affected by Armed Conflict

STI: Sexually transmitted infection

UN: United Nations

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNMIL: United Nations Mission in Liberia

US\$: United States Dollars

L\$: Liberian Dollars (One US dollar is equivalent to about 54 Liberian dollars at current exchange rate)

WFP: World Food Programme

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The people of Liberia have experienced ongoing suffering over the past two decades as a result of war and displacement. Children have been drawn into this in many ways, such as recruitment into armed forces, separation from their families, witnessing atrocities, rape and torture. Thousands have been driven from their homes into exile into neighbouring countries or camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) within Liberia.

This study focuses on children remaining in those camps and those who have recently been repatriated to their towns and villages of origin after the end of the war.

Save the Children, along with many other non-governmental organisations, has been working alongside the Liberian government in the IDP camps. During the course of our work with children, Save the Children staff became aware that many children were agreeing to have sex with older men for money, food and other goods and favours. In order to document more closely the circumstances surrounding this issue, and to look at ways to improve Save the Children's delivery of assistance to better protect children against such exploitation, we instigated a study in four IDP camps and four communities with a high population of people returning from the camps.

The study was conducted using focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs). It aimed to:

- provide children with an opportunity to define their needs and in particular their basic needs based on their experience of conflict and displacement.
- document the circumstances in which children in IDP settings use transactional sex in order to meet basic and other needs of their families or themselves.
- provide recommendations to inform programme decisions, ie, to strengthen programmatic approaches to address underlying causes of sexual exploitation.
- develop increased levels of understanding on how children, parents and communities in camps perceive the practice of children engaging in sex in exchange for goods and services.
- document findings in order to conduct advocacy with donors and other humanitarian actors in line with Sphere Standards.

During the study, participants shared consistent accounts of children engaging in sex both in the camps and in communities as a means of survival. The results of the study are presented here for further discussion with other members of the international community in an effort to address the problem in a pro-active and productive way.

The children and adults who participated in the study were very open and willing to talk about the subject. Given that the FGDs were independent of one another, the findings demonstrated remarkable consistency. The results of the study show a high level of children involved in 'selling sex'<sup>1</sup> (as the respondents put it, 'man business'). Respondents estimated that a high proportion of girls, in both the camps and returnee communities, are involved. The girls reportedly ranged in age from eight to eighteen years, with girls of 12 years and upwards identified as being regularly involved in 'selling sex'.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'transactional sex' is also used for this form of having sex for money, etc, but both terms are problematic as they suggest a situation of equal exchange, which is certainly not the case for children, and not for many women.

Reference was consistently made to men with money or status being involved in this exploitation. Camp officials, humanitarian workers, businessmen, peacekeepers, government employees and even teachers were frequently cited.

Most people cited lack of economic and livelihood opportunities, as well as chronic poverty, as underlying causes for the ongoing exploitation of children. Parents reported feeling powerless to stop children who were having sex in exchange for goods and services as they did not have the economic means to provide for their children. In some instances, families cited that transactional sex was a means of supporting the wider family to access things such as food or money to purchase food. In other instances, children identified more personal needs such as clothing or being able to access video clubs to watch films. The widespread nature of the problem meant it affected children in a broad cross section of environments, including entertainment centres, latrines, video clubs, bush land surrounding camps, even homes and where distributions take place.

Alarming trends began to emerge during the discussions with communities. All of the communities and camp inhabitants described the widespread nature of the problem and the increasing resignation among adults and children that sex in exchange for goods, services and as a means of survival was becoming a more common option for children to support themselves and their families. Any level of acceptance of exploitation in post-war countries will have a detrimental social and economic impact and therefore all possible steps must be taken immediately to stop this.

It is clear from the information shared with Save the Children consistently throughout the study that urgent action must be taken at all levels to stop and prevent the ongoing exploitation of children by older men in positions of power and with money. While efforts have been made by various sectors of the international community in the last four years, it is clear from the prevalence of the problem that the steps taken to date are not addressing the problem sufficiently. International agencies must re-examine the steps taken to date and acknowledge what has not worked and what more needs to be done. Donors, international and UN agencies, peacekeepers and relevant governments must take action to increase more robust monitoring systems to hold those who exploit children accountable.

# INTRODUCTION

In the past 15 years, Liberia has experienced major conflict. More than 250,000 people,<sup>2</sup> mostly civilians, lost their lives. During this time, it is estimated that more than 1.3 million people were displaced. Twenty-five Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps were set up in Liberia to house many of the displaced people clustered around the already overcrowded capital, Monrovia. Many Liberians have been, and continue to be, heavily reliant on humanitarian assistance as a means of survival. Those who are able to find work often still live in chronic poverty with the national average wage of US\$50 per month.

Save the Children has been working in Liberia since 1991. From a number of assessments, and from anecdotal evidence, it became apparent to Save the Children staff working in the field that there is an alarming number of children contributing to the family income by engaging in sexual liaisons for money, favours or material goods. The overwhelming majority of reports received by Save the Children related to men and girls, but information also highlighted that, under extreme poverty and continuous hardship, the whole community is increasingly resigned to the fact that engaging in transactional sex can provide basic necessities.

The study was intended to explore the ways in which children in IDP camps are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse as they attempt to meet their basic and other needs, and to look at the role and responsibilities of humanitarian agencies to provide more protective systems for the delivery of assistance. During the discussions in the field, 315 men, women and children were consulted.

Save the Children acknowledges from the outset that this was not a detailed piece of 'research' on the topic of sexual exploitation. During the discussion the participants consistently spoke of the prevalence of girls engaging in sex with men in exchange for money, goods and services. All of the respondents clearly stated that they felt that the scale of the problem affected over half of the girls in their locations. Based on the consistency of the reports and the widespread nature of the problem it was felt that it was important for Save the Children to collaboratively raise awareness of the issue and begin a dialogue to explore more robust ways of tackling the problem and to build upon the steps that have already been taken by some agencies over the last four years.

This discussion paper is presented in four sections: introduction, methodology used, presentation of research findings and conclusion and recommendations. It is hoped that these suggestions will help facilitate a discussion to encourage governmental, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the United Nations (UN) to find solutions to the problem of the sexual exploitation of children in Liberia and elsewhere.

## **Definitions**

Save the children defines a child as a boy or girl under the age of 18 years.

Save the Children defines sexual exploitation as the abuse of any position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes against a child; this includes profiting or gaining monetarily, socially, politically or for personal pleasure from any sexual interaction with a child.

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2004

## METHODOLOGY

This was a qualitative study based on the narratives of people in the various communities. The field work was conducted by a team of nine Save the Children staff members during late 2005.

This information gathered through focus group discussions and in depth interviews with a total of 158 children and 167 adults from four camps and four returnee communities. Within that group, 26 per cent were boys, 23 per cent girls, 27 per cent men and 24 per cent were women. Fifty-six per cent of respondents were in IDP camps, while 48 per cent had returned to their community.

In addition, many ideas and opinions were sought from other informants along the way. Save the Children and other NGOs, UN and government staff were informed of the study and its preliminary findings. We shared the terms of reference with the Protection Core Group in Liberia (an inter-agency group addressing protection issues in Liberia), the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) and the Ministry for Gender and Development for information and comment. The information given to Save the Children in our discussion groups was consistent and did not differ greatly from camp to community.

In each location, the focus groups were held simultaneously, with two members of the research team conducting each focus group. At the end of the discussion (lasting on average about one-and-a-half hours), two respondents were selected to participate in in-depth interviews.

The people were not informed as to the precise nature of the research before the team went to the field. They were told that we wished to talk about livelihoods and how people meet their basic needs. Owing to the possible sensitivities about sexual exploitation, it was felt appropriate that we should observe whether or not sexual exploitation as a way of making money was brought up spontaneously by the participants. In effect, therefore, the information gained from each of the focus groups was spontaneous and independent of that obtained from the other groups, and not biased by prior discussion of the topic.



# STUDY FINDINGS

## BASIC NEEDS AND LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

### Basic Needs and Access to Assistance

Most of the children in the camps and communities cited access to education (textbooks, copy books and uniform or school fees) as basic necessities, along with food and clothing, above everything else.

Some children, and most of the adults, also included good housing, safe drinking water, sanitation and healthcare, a good road network, security and peace in the country, agricultural materials (in order to be able to cultivate), good government, churches and mosques, recreational areas for children, job opportunities and basic social services.

In the camps people are generally dependent on NGOs and the UN for most of their food and non-food items. When these supplies are insufficient, or when extra money is needed for school fees and school books, etc, means of making money have to be found.

Residents of the IDP camps are generally reliant on monthly food rations. However, residents report that a proportion of these supplies are siphoned off elsewhere and people do not always receive their full entitlement. In addition, since repatriation began, the rations in many of the camps have been reduced and some people reported to the research team that they had not received food for months.

### Access to Income

A major problem identified by all the participants was the limited opportunity to earn money in order to purchase the extra items needed. When asked how they managed to meet these needs, people reported a variety of ways, including:

- **Doing petty business** such as selling small items for profit such as firewood, charcoal, oil, cooked food, etc
- **Doing contract work** for local farmers, businessmen or community members in the nearby villages or towns, eg, cutting palm nuts or grass
- **Work for the local market traders**, eg, washing kola nuts, sorting dried pepper and groundnuts
- **Selling a part of their food**
- **Begging money from friends or relatives**
- **Utilising a skill or training**, eg, teaching, soap-making, etc, which may be used to find employment
- **Harvesting or growing food produce** (however this is limited to urban camp dwellers). Livelihood options were greater in the communities as people had access to land for cultivation but many people were lacking seeds and tools, or had not been able yet to harvest produce.

### Children as Income Earners

Children are required to provide money or supplement for the family. Children as young as five years old have become breadwinners since the war. Boys and girls reported making money by:

- **Contract work:** manual jobs for local farmers or market traders. Average earnings are in the region of L\$40 to L\$60 a day (around US\$1).
- **Selling things:** such as cold water and 'Kool Aid' (a drink) or kerosene etc. for market traders or parents. They are paid around L\$30 to L\$50 a day. for this (under US\$1).
- **Other ways:** such as fetching and carrying, fishing, begging and stealing.

- **Having sex with older men:** Very many girls make money by ‘loving’ (having sex with) ‘big people’: men who have money.

*“The youngest [girls] are loving to big, big men for money. Some of the men are in and some out of the camp. Some of the children went to the community to live with the man and he in turn sent them to school and helps their family. Underage children are forced ‘to reach life stage’ (sexual maturity) and because of this, teenage pregnancy is on the increase.”*

*“Some of our friends go to the dance club [and] love to strange, strange men just to get money.”*

## **TRANSACTIONAL SEX AS A MEANS OF SURVIVAL**

*“They are between 10 and 15 years; as soon as they see their ‘tete’ [breasts] coming up then they jump in this man business.”*

In both camps and returnee communities, the estimates by respondents of the numbers of girls engaged in obtaining benefit through sex are disturbingly high. Perceptions ranged, but were always alarmingly high. In every location people told us of girls from 12 years and upwards being regularly involved in ‘selling sex’, but, in many locations there was an awareness of girls as young as eight to ten years being involved.

The issue of boys being engaged in the same way was less openly discussed. **Most people claimed not to have heard of cases of boys being sexually exploited in the camps or towns, or only very rarely**, While the taboos around homosexuality could account for this, boys engaging in transactional sex appears to be less common than men having sex with young girls. However, some people cited boys as young as 14 years being involved.

### **What Factors lead to the Involvement of Children in Transactional Sex?**

The factors leading to transactional sex were identified as:

- **Severe economic deprivation**, seen as the primary reason behind children being involved
- **Peer pressure**, “Where there is a group of girls they encourage one another to do this kind of thing to make money.”
- **Pressure from parents:** Some children are encouraged by parents and other family members.
- **Seeing other children with material things**, like fashionable clothes and cell phones, and wanting them for themselves.
- **Boredom** has been linked to children engaging in risk-taking activities like drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana and going to the dance halls or entertainment centres where they are exposed to men who are looking for sex.

In every FGD and IDI **without exception**, people told us that there are many more young girls involved in selling sex to make money than there are mature women. The overriding reason cited for this is that **men can have sex with young girls for very little in return**, sometimes nothing.

*“Girls who are mainly involved in the man business are young children and teenagers who the man can easily fool with small money. I know a man who said that there are two classes of street girls – the high class and the low class. So when the men are broke, they go to the low class: the teenagers.”*

People said that young children are easy to influence with the promise of small luxuries.

## Who is at Risk?

*“All children are at risk in the camps because of the hard living conditions, the lack of money, children and parents not sleeping in the same place. Parents cannot control their children as we are separated from them. Parents have to go out and look for cash and children are left on their own.”*

- **Children living by themselves or heading households of younger siblings** (of which there are many, since many parents were killed or became separated from their children during the war).
- **Children living with very old parents, or living with single mothers** who have a limited capability of generating income.
- **Families that are very poor**, where children have to assist in making money for the family.
- **Very young girls (under 14 years of age)** are also more vulnerable because of their lack of maturity, both physically and emotionally.
- **Children living with step-parents, foster parents or extended family members** are sometimes treated unfavourably and may not be supported to go to school, and instead are expected to make their contribution to the household income.

## Who Is Involved?

*“Men come from different communities. They say that the camp has good, good girls and so they come here to look for them.”*

A broad cross-section of men were identified as being involved in having sex with children. These were generally adult men between 30 to 60 years of age with some money or 'status'. Some of these are men within the camps but many come from outside, visiting or working temporarily in, or in the vicinity of, the camps.

In all locations we were told of the following men involved:

- **Sugar daddies or older men** who support a girl with food, clothing and school fees, etc, in return for sex.
- **Businessmen** in the community, from the surrounding towns or villages, from the city or from other countries.
- **Peacekeeping soldiers**. In each location where there is or has been a UN peacekeeping contingent, they were identified as being involved in the sexual exploitation of young girls.
- **Humanitarian workers**. All focus groups and individual interviewees without exception mentioned NGO workers.
- **Video club operators**. These were identified as asking for sex in return for allowing admittance. In addition, video clubs admit children where x-rated pornographic movies are shown.
- **'Big men' in the camps**, including members of the Camp Management Committee (CMC), block leaders and officials.
- **Government workers/officials**
- **Police officers**.
- **Ex-combatants**. They were specifically mentioned in two of the camps as men with money who sought girls for sex.
- **Soldiers from the Liberian Army**.
- **Teachers** in the camps and in the community who have sex with pupils in lieu of school fees.

## NGO and UN Employees

*"I have been asked more than 20 times by men to go with them for money. All are NGO workers."*

National and international NGO and UN employees are seen to be men of status as they are paid relatively well compared with most other employees and often have access to a vehicle. In addition they may be distributing food or material goods, which they can use to entice girls. Some international NGOs (INGOs) may sometimes use implementing partners (local NGOs) who are also implicated in sexual activities with underage children.

It is clear that sex with underage girls by humanitarian workers continues openly.

## Peacekeeping Soldiers

*"If you go out with [have sex with] men you can get money to buy the things you need. My friend had no money before. Now she is selling because she is loving to UNMIL."*

In the research, sexual exploitation of children by peacekeeping soldiers was described in every location where a contingent was stationed, not only in the IDP camps, but also in the towns. Girls come in from nearby villages, towns and cities to make money from the presence of a large peacekeeping contingent.

## Camp Management Committee and Block Leaders

*"In the camp most camp officials were loving to [seeking sex with] children: CMC, block leaders and securities. During distribution, when these people have interest in some of the girls, the authorities serve them very fast. After the distribution they would arrange an appointment with these girls. At times, we see them discussing with the children [girls] in evening time."*

In all the IDP camps where discussion groups were conducted, the Camp Management Committee (CMC) and block leaders were implicated.

Men reportedly frequently ask young boys to find girls for them. Sometimes men will also ask girls to find their friends to have sex with them; even women were said to do this at times. They are known in the camps as 'middlemen' or 'mediators'. We were told this in every location we visited.

## What Do the Girls Get In Exchange?

*"Sometimes [girls get] nothing for having sex with older men. It happened to me at one time. I know this man and we agreed to go out [have sex for money] but he always told me to come back some other time for something. He never really gave me anything."*

*"If you wanted to come to this camp and have sex with a girl, you would take her to the video club and buy 'small, small' food for her and you could have her as much as you want."*

The study identified that men give girls:

- Small amounts of **money**
- Material things such as fashionable **clothing, cell phones, perfume, watches**, things for **styling hair**, etc
- **Favours**, for example, giving girls a pass in their **school grades**
- NGO workers may offer to give the girls a **ride in their vehicle**
- Basic food items such as **bulgur wheat, beans, cornmeal, oil, etc**
- Some girls have had sex for a bottle of **beer**, or to be allowed **to see a video**

- We were told many times that young girls are often promised things but get **nothing** in return; they are cheated

### **Where does exploitation take place?**

In all the camps, people cited **distribution centres** as places where men look for girls for sex, and **video clubs and nightclubs, dance areas or entertainment centres**.

'Ghetto' areas of the camps are areas where alcohol and drugs are sold and consumed. Some children sell alcohol and they are at particular risk of rape and sexual exploitation. The surrounding **bush land** is also referred to as a dangerous place for children as some children collecting firewood, etc, have been raped. **Latrines, washing areas**, and the area around the **hand pumps** are places where men may go to look for girls to have sex with, often at night time. In the camps, however, camp officials or NGO workers were reported to approach girls in their **homes**.

In the towns, **video clubs, shops selling liquor, nightclubs** and the area around **peacekeeping bases** are also common 'pick-up' places, as are the **markets** and **football fields**; even the **school campus**.

However, many people in the camps and in the towns said that men approach girls **anywhere on the street**. Humanitarian workers or peacekeepers stop their vehicles to ask girls on the road.

## **ROLES AND ATTITUDES OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES**

### **The Notion of Accepted Practice**

People unanimously agreed that children selling sex constitutes exploitation.

*"Although some of the girls see the men as helping them, the community still see it as exploitation... These girls have not reached the age yet when they can make choices for their lives. They are not mature enough to begin sexual activities."*

Most people said that the **community do not like it, but have come to accept it** because of poverty and the dire situation in the camps. Communities also said that it is now more difficult to advise parents and children against this situation.

*"People don't really accept it but, because of the financial constraints, people just have to do so. Most of them are in households headed by only the mother, catering for children. Their fathers got killed in the war. Or some fathers are living but can't afford to care for their children; they have to accept the situation, as there is no way out."*

In one of the communities, the town leadership managed to get a house that was used as a motel [for men to have sex with girls] closed. They told us that the town leaders have talked to most of the young girls involved in sex for money but they do not listen.

*"Many parents are happy to get the money from the girl, but if she gets pregnant and the man disowns her, then the parents blame the child and may turn their backs on her and put her out of the home."*

Some girls who become pregnant are **rejected by their family** because of the shame and disgrace, and because it means an extra mouth to feed. Most often the **men who got them pregnant reject them** too, or deny that they are responsible for the pregnancy.

## Pre War and Post War Context

People unanimously agreed that **attitudes have fundamentally changed** since the war:

*“It is like the cultural tradition is not holding [any] more. People have lost the cultural values and the tradition has been broken down.”*

Most people said that children were not involved in prostitution before the war, or to a very small extent, and that this only happened in the cities but not in the villages.

There was overall agreement among respondents that camps posed a greater risk to exposing children to sexual exploitation. Reasons for this were cited as the density of the population, too many people from different communities living together in one place, and parents being unable to support their children and provide even the basic necessities. Apart from there being no job opportunities for parents, many children were not going to school in the camps and there were no sporting or other recreational activities for the children. They also talked of the deplorable living conditions, with families sleeping in one hut together. Often there is not enough room to house all the children, who would then sleep in a separate hut, away from the parents' control.

*“[Sexual exploitation] was more in the camp as some children had their own shelters and it was very common to have sex. In the community, children sleep under same roof as their parents. It is impossible to have sex in same house with your parents so it will reduce in community.”*

In returning communities, people complained of the lack of adequate shelter as most of the houses were badly damaged or destroyed, and lack of money. Many girls who return to their communities continue to make a living by having sex. When the WFP rations are finished, people have to find their own means of survival. Facilities that were free in the camps or in the towns during the war have to be paid for, such as housing (rent), schooling and medication.

## Reporting and Responding To Sexual Exploitation

Most people interviewed distinguished cases of what they called rape [forced sex] from sex with underage girls who participated willingly. People mostly said that they would **report cases of rape to the police**, but did not feel that they would get very far reporting cases of underage sex. In some of the camps, people told us the following reasons for not reporting cases of sexual exploitation of children:

- They would not know where to report it as the Camp Management Committee and block leaders were themselves involved in it.
- They would not want to report NGO staff, as they were concerned that the assistance provided by the NGO might be withdrawn if they did so.
- The girls who are being abused feel they are benefiting from the transaction and may be angry with them for reporting the cases.
- Similarly, some parents also do not report as they are benefiting from their children's activities.

**In the camps**, people told us that the official mechanisms for reporting were through the **Camp Management Committee, the block leaders, the camp security guard, the Community Watch Team, the LRRRC, the police or NGOs dealing in child protection.**

**In the towns**, people said they could report to the **community leaders/ town chiefs**, and if necessary, they could take it to the **town commissioner**. They would also report **rape to the child**

**rights advocates, the police and to parents.** They also said that **if a perpetrator worked for an NGO, it could be reported to his boss.**

However, the vast majority consistently stated that they do not report cases of sexual exploitation in town or camp.

## **ROLES OF HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF AFFECTED POPULATIONS**

From the focus groups' discussions, the factors that contribute to the sexual exploitation of children include the inadequacy of levels and types of humanitarian assistance itself, lack of low risk alternative support to livelihoods, poorly-managed system for the distribution and monitoring of assistance.

Without their entitlements people are forced to look for money and food elsewhere, thereby exacerbating the problem of sexual exploitation.

- Most people complained of **lack of sufficient food and delays in the food supplies.** Many people complained of spending **long periods of time** (maybe three to four days) in the hot sun or rain **queuing for food.** The elderly and disabled were not exempt from this.
- Some people who had ration cards were told that their names were not on the log and that they would have to buy the food from the people doing the distribution, or **men would offer to have sex with them for food.**
- Since repatriation (moving people from the camps back to their towns and villages of origin) began, everyone complained that his or her **food rations had been cut.**

*“Things are very hard on us here. Before, I used to get two bags of bulgur wheat and one gallon of oil [a month] but the people came and cut the food down [WFP]. ....Now I am only getting one bag of bulgur wheat with half a gallon of oil which cannot feed me and my children for the month.”*

- The **huts**, which the IDPs build for themselves with materials provided for them by the humanitarian agencies, tend to be **small and congested** for the numbers of people living in them.
- In the camps where repatriation has commenced, people complained of **lack of functioning hand pumps** and **poor latrine facilities**, many toilets and **bathhouses being in a poor state of repair.** In some places girls were having to bathe in communal bathhouses without any doors.
- Although some children have benefited from free schooling provided in the camps by various NGOs, this was only available to primary school children and people complained of the **lack of junior and senior high schools.** Older children were only able to access such schooling by parents sending them out to schools in nearby towns, for which they had to pay school fees.
- Despite HIV and AIDS awareness-raising workshops having taken place in every camp, particularly among the children, we were told by the men and the women that humanitarian agencies doing the training were also involved in the sex trade.

*“As for the NGOs, they are carry[ing] out awareness on sexual exploitation, HIV and AIDS and STIs, but during the night hours they are the same people running after these 12 years girls.”*

- The children talked about NGOs providing **skills training** in such things as pastry making, bread making and sewing **so that children can work to get money**. However this training needs to be **supported by funding or materials** to start the business.
- In some camps where repatriation had started **NGOs had withdrawn their support** and people had to pay for medication and schooling that used to be supplied for free.

Although people depend on the assistance that NGOs things such as skills training, HIV and AIDS awareness-raising, teaching on children’s rights etc, *everyone* said that **the presence of NGO staff in the camps exacerbates the problem of sexual exploitation of young girls**.

*“Having NGOs around increased [sexual exploitation] because of the high wages NGOs paid their workers who are in this ugly behaviour. Most of the NGO workers do not live in the town; they work here and they are the ones who are doing it.”*

People recognised, however that NGOs had an important role to play in helping to rebuild communities that had been damaged or destroyed by the war.



## CONCLUSION

Based on the information gathered for this study, it appears that despite some initiatives to reduce sexual exploitation and abuse little change has been affected to the lives of vulnerable children since 2002. It is clear that the current monitoring systems are failing to identify the true scale of the exploitation of children. The international community at all levels needs to strengthen and develop truly effective and transparent monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

There are also other worrying trends that need to be better understood. It appears that sexual exploitation in war affected communities is pervasive; however what we have seen is that it is no longer confined to refugee and IDP camp settings. There are significant developments which indicate the communities are becoming increasingly resigned to the fact that sex in exchange for goods and services is another method of survival. This alarming trend could have a significant long-term impact on communities' social and economic recovery, and must be addressed by those with the responsibility to protect at every level as a matter of urgency.

The international community and relevant national governments must look openly and critically at the steps that have been taken to prevent exploitation to be able to assess why the current strategies have not been effective. We must also be able to identify new ways to improve our systems to better protect vulnerable children in Liberia and elsewhere.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## To All

- The Government of Liberia , the UN Senior Management Team in Country and INGOs should work with civil society to create and implement a government-led Ombudsman office that determines appropriate disciplinary and judicial responses to reported incidents. This office should be invested with the authority and resources to effect an immediate and dramatic reversal of current levels of impunity. In order to do this, the group should proactively pursue wide coverage and geographical spread in its ongoing caseload, as well as pursuing and resolving a critical mass of cases within its first six months of existence to publicly demonstrate the workings and consequences of a new zero tolerance policy upheld by all key actors.
- The constitution of this group should have a minimum 50 per cent representation of women and should be initiated immediately. The design of the process should be done in consultation with girls, boys, parents, girl mothers and other vulnerable groups. One of the first activities of this office should be to set up a reporting system that incorporates witness and informant protection.

## To the UN Secretariat

- Within the next two months, the Secretary General, the Head of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Emergency Response Co-ordinator and Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC) should meet to develop a UN Plan of Action that incorporates a thorough analysis of the global extent of the use of humanitarian aid and the role of humanitarian actors and peacekeepers in the exploitation and abuse of children and vulnerable people in post conflict settings and to identify why measures to date have been inadequate to enforce zero tolerance. The plan should be made public within six months and resourced for immediate implementation.

## To International Donors

- With immediate effect, donors, including international NGOs, should hold their partners contractually accountable to report all incidents of sexual abuse and exploitation, and action taken, for project reporting periods. Donors should require that the Core Principles of Codes of Conduct are included in all implementing partners' codes of conduct and should ensure a zero tolerance policy is enacted.
- With immediate effect, donors in emergency and post-emergency settings should require partners to allocate 2–4 per cent of funding for proactive measures to prevent and address sexual abuse and exploitation, and monitor the quality and efficacy of these measures as for other funded project components. Donors should act upon the earlier recommendations made in 2003 to hold their implementing partners contractually accountable to the conduct of their staff world wide.
- The Ombudsman office should be fully funded and resourced through international donors, the UN and the Government of Liberia, if it is able to carry out its functions effectively.
- Over the next 6 months, donors should increase their funding for sustainable community based livelihoods programmes by 50 per cent. Sufficient livelihoods focus is part and parcel of

ensuring that rehabilitation and reintegration activities are fully resourced. These livelihoods programmes need to better target girls and young women in order to provide them with viable alternatives to transactional sex.

### **To the Government of Liberia**

- Within 6 months, take steps to effectively implement legislation which prosecutes perpetrators of sexual abuse and exploitation, including those working in the public sector, such as civil servants, teachers and health workers. All public sector workers should be made aware of and actively held accountable against minimum standards of behaviour which are enshrined in a code of conduct on exploitation and abuse and associated monitoring, whistle-blowing and response mechanisms for the public sector.
- With immediate effect, expand its current policies and government initiatives to go beyond rape to include sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Enact a zero tolerance policy for troops committing exploitation and abuse and ensure that such individuals are treated through its Ombudsman office.
- Institute a country-wide public awareness campaign on the issue covering extent of the problem, consequences for victims, strategies to reduce exploitation, punitive / judicial consequences for perpetrators of exploitation and abuse in the next 6 months.
- The Government of Liberia, Ministry of Education, Gender and Health should ensure public health messaging and school curriculum should include information on risks of exploitation, as well as alternatives to transactional sex and reporting options.
- Develop and publicise by 31 October 2006 a realistic and resourced plan to improve access to quality secondary education for girls and boys, with clear, regular milestones for demonstrating increasing impact in line with full attainment of all goals by 2009.
- Review selection, gender balance and training of teachers with a view to improving child protection within the school environment.

### **To Governments Contributing Troops to UN Peacekeeping Missions**

- Troop contributing countries should hold accountable those troops who are engaged in the exploitation of children by ensuring they go through judiciary proceedings. They must ensure that any individual under investigation who is found culpable of wrong-doing be immediately removed from the force and must not be rotated elsewhere.

### **To UN Peace Keepers**

- DPKO must reinforce more robust monitoring of troop conduct by reinforcing systems that would feed information directly to the head of the DPKO, the UN Secretariat and to commanders in troop-contributing militaries for follow-through.
- Expand role of the Conduct and Discipline Unit in Liberia and DPKO should design and implement measures to promote meaningful and constructive participation of children and communities in DPKOs conduct monitoring mechanisms.

## **To Local NGOs**

- Improve management of field staff to ensure awareness of and accountability to minimum standards of conduct at all levels.
- Design, resource and implement mechanisms to monitor conduct of staff and contractors and to illicit and respond immediately to concerns raised or cases reported.
- Local NGOs should set up and implement sexual abuse and exploitation codes of conduct and disciplinary procedures for their staff.

## **To International NGOs**

- All international NGOs must undertake a global audit of progress against the recommendations of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) task force on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse by January 2007. This audit should identify both shortcomings in compliance with the original recommendations, and more broadly what barriers these organisations face to ensure the effective eradication of exploitation and abuse. Audit recommendations should be concrete, time-bound, and be made public.
- INGOs working with children should establish an effective code of conduct which is monitored and enforced and an implementation plan to ensure that all staff, partners and contractors are aware of their duties and responsibilities within it.
- INGOs should develop robust mechanisms to hold local partners accountable to fair and equitable delivery of assistance.
- INGOs should investigate all allegations of staff misconduct relating to sexual exploitation and abuse and take action where cases are proven. All cases should be reported to the relevant government authority.
- Continue to train new staff and staff in partner organisations on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

## **To UN Agencies**

- WFP should review the content and coverage of food ration distributions to remove food-related incentives for transactional sex. All ration cuts must be implemented only according to need rather than in 'across the board' decreases or as measures to promote return or other non-food related policies.
- All UN agencies must undertake an audit of progress against the recommendations of the IASC task force on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. The findings of audit results should be made public for greater accountability and transparency.
- All UN agencies should do an immediate review of their local partners and field-based staff and do regular checks to ensure local partners are abiding by codes of conduct. These checks should include consultations with communities and should take effect immediately.
- Continue to train new staff on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.