

## 6. MAJOR FINDINGS WITH RESPECT TO EVALUATION CRITERIA

### 6.1. *Relevance*

#### 6.1.1. Identification of needs

Focus on high-risk groups has been the objective of ECHO. The intervention of ECHO enables the assistance and protection of the vulnerable group of ex-combatant and separated children. ECHO's assistance is a critical resource for UNICEF.

As a result of the war, there is a large number of ex-combatant/separated children in Sierra Leone. As shown in the paragraph 'background', the group of combatant children and separated children is a highly vulnerable one. Thanks to the support of the international NGO COOPI, ECHO focused its attention on the girls released by the rebels and their children. The girls were systematically raped and many of them became pregnant. Medical and social consequences for these girls can be especially serious, due to complications arising from STDs, social rejection and alienation because of sexual encounters.

The babies, sometimes called "rebel babies", are more at risk of being abused by their mothers (physical or emotional abuse) than babies of mothers who are supported by their family. As a result of sexual abuse and exploitation, these mothers showed difficulties in coping with the issues of pregnancy and childbearing.

Another consequence of the war is people who were victims of amputations (directly caused by the rebels) and/or victims of the fighting (bullet wounds, lacerations, paralysis, etc.)

There are also disabled people who have been directly victims of the war (like the numerous polio cases). The conflict has seriously disrupted the rehabilitation services, through the destruction of the infrastructures that used to provide such services.

#### 6.1.2. *Beneficiaries*

It is very difficult to arrive at a precise figure for the number of children missing in Sierra Leone and expected to come through the Child Protection Network. UNICEF estimates in 1999 the number was 5,400 combatant children (RUF + AFRC + CDF), 10,000 associated with the fighting forces and/or separated, plus 1,500 additional abducted children. There is an unknown number of combatant girls/girls associated with the fighting forces.

Indirectly, the children of the girl-mothers will benefit from the programme, as well as the children of the community.

While the project aim is child protection for those affected by war, less attention has been given to the intervention plan 2001 for the children in the IDP camps and in the returnees camps. Only HI gives further psychosocial support to these children. All these children have been through the war and form a group of children neglected by the various organisations. With these children in mind, a few small, relatively inconsistent projects are organised by national and/or international NGOs. According to an unpublished MSF study, 41% of these children present post-traumatic stress symptoms.

Even for the amputees and war wounded, no statistics are readily available. In the report of the Workshop on Development of a National Policy on Prosthetics and Orthotics Services in Sierra Leone, the figures reported for the regions of Freetown, Bo/Kenema and Makeni give approximately 800 cases of people who have been amputated at the upper limbs and 600 cases of persons who have been amputated at the lower limbs. For the same geographic regions, the numbers of persons handicapped by polio is about 1,800.

#### 6.1.3. *Strategy*

The project funded by ECHO corresponds to the logic of the DDR programme developed by UNICEF and the MSWGCA. ECHO supports ICCs in several provinces. The ICC is an indispensable link in the DDR programme. Indirectly, ECHO also intervenes in the reunification and reintegration process, by means of the training that the agents received in the ICC. It is practically impossible to separate the phase of reception in the ICC from the reunification phase. The reintegration phase is a longer term job.

In 2001, ECHO renewed its support for the international NGOs working in the DDR programme, encouraging them to make a fund-raising effort to enable them to work in the longer term. In October 2001, the GoSL/RUF/UNOMSIL Committee on DDR agreed on the completion of the disarmament programme. The programme will probably finish by the end of November. This is unrealistic. Not all the children will be demobilised, reunified and reintegrated in the community at that time.

#### *6.1.4. Co-ordination, coherence and complementarity*

The DDR programme used in SL is based on experience with child-soldiers in other countries, but adapted to the Sierra Leone context.

There is coherence and complementarity between the various ICC teams. These teams, child protection agencies and other agents in the DDR programme meet monthly and try to develop the same strategy for taking charge of the children. If they did not do this, they believe children would leave one ICC for another that appears to be more advantageous for them.

The ICCs are complementary: COOPI specialises in working with young mothers and girls who are rape victims, SCF has developed a complete strategy on how to work with the RUF, and HI has expertise in working with severely traumatised children. The mission regrets that there is not more exchange of experience between the various teams and that the expertise of all is not used. Unfortunately, international aid is a highly competitive environment.

On several occasions, ECHO has organised meetings with NGOs that it finances. The mission has done the same and was able to see for itself that some NGOs feel that ECHO should restrict itself to financing the operations and no more.

## **6.2. Effectiveness**

The ICCs supported by ECHO are located in Western (COOPI – Freetown), Southern (IRC – Bo) and Eastern (IRC – Kenema, Kono, SCF - Daru) provinces. Handicap International is responsible for the psychosocial support of the team of Christian Brother's ICC in Bo and St. Michael's ICC in Lakka. Children Aid Direct co-operate with Caritas on the reunification and reintegration of ex-combatant/separated children of the Northern Province.

Collecting data on effectiveness has been problematic.

In August 2001, there were 12 ICCs in Sierra Leone. ECHO supports six of them (50 %).

Number of separated children in ICC for year 2000 (sources UNICEF /Annex 10):

- Demobilised children 1,742 (190 girls)
- Separated children 979 (222 girls)

The mission observed a difference in the number of children, between observed results and anticipated results. Fewer children were received in the ICC than initially planned. The demobilisation of the children is very irregular. During the beginning of the second phase, the number of children in the ICC of Daru (SCF) remained very small, with a total of 20 boys and 6 girls. In June, 234 children were released, 175 from the RUF and 45 from the CDF. Most of the children released by the RUF did not require ICC facilities.

In almost all ICCs, there are still almost no teenage girls.

The lighter workload, due to the small number of children, enabled the mental health workers to concentrate on reunification work and particularly on the indispensable need for awareness work in the communities receiving former combatant children. The mission considers that on the whole work done was effective.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of data about average time passed in ICCs, severity of trauma and so on.

## **6.3. Efficiency**

### *6.3.1. Partners' operational capacities*

The international NGOs that act as ECHO's partners have experience in working with traumatised children. They collaborate closely with UNICEF, which has worldwide leadership in taking charge of unaccompanied children.

The international staffs are stationed in Freetown and spend proportionately little time in the field with the national staff: as a result, this staffs does not get continuing training.

Access to professional literature is insufficient for national staff (except COOPI), which hinders them in their professional fulfilment.

It is unfortunate that computers are not used more to process data for a database that would allow for research and analysis.

#### *6.3.2. Personnel*

The international staffs are responsible for the working strategy, while the national staff carries out the daily work under the supervision of the head of the expatriates. There is considerable turnover in the expatriate staff: this prevents continuity in training of social workers, who are constantly asked to adapt. The culture of Sierra Leone is complex—understanding and integrating it takes time, which is not compatible with short assignments. As a result, in some NGOs there is friction between the national and international staff, friction which is not always explicit but which causes frustrations for the national staff. The mission recommends that national social workers occupy more key positions and be more involved in developing strategies and taking decisions, as is the case in HI. The gender representation in the national staff takes account of the problems. COOPI has far more women.

#### *6.3.3. Management of operations in the field*

The operations are structured. In the event of an emergency, such as serious difficulties with a young person, the ICC caregivers can always reach a social worker who will take action if necessary. The minimum personnel always include at least two caregivers working with the children. Medical monitoring of the children is well organised. In the event of hospitalisation, a carer stays with the child if necessary. The children are cared for individually, wherever possible, but this depends on the number of children accepted in the ICC.

The partners have a good understanding of the security implications. There is very regular contact between the base and the field. Cars are equipped with a radio. But the national staffs criticise the expatriates' extreme prudence. Although certain international NGOs working in the medical sector are already in the field, Child Protection NGOs are holding back, despite the very real need for them.

#### *6.3.4. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting*

Although the number of children who have been reintegrated their families/foster families/the community is reported, none of the projects has done real analysis on the quality of the reintegration that would help adapt the strategy. Note that UNICEF has done an analysis of Alternative Care for Caritas and the Family Home Movement. The equipment for a job using operational research is available, and there is a lot of it. But due to lack of time, as well as the lack of use or familiarity with computers, the data has not been systematically recorded and analysed. Contacts are not established with the local university to set up research projects. The expatriates, with little input from the national staff, carry out any research work done.

The persons involved complain about the quantity of reports they have to do for ECHO. The mission estimates that the four-monthly reports are too descriptive and repetitive. Quality of these reports is poor and they do not give an understanding of the evolution of the project, showing its achievements and difficulties. The reports are submitted at irregular intervals. The annual reports are more interesting and some of them, such as SCF, COOPI and CAD, explain their evolution and include self-criticism. They show flexibility in care and continually adapt their strategy.

#### *6.3.5. Quality of ECHO monitoring*

The Echo office in Freetown is the liaison between the partners and Brussels. The projects are visited more or less regularly. Availability of the technical assistant is noted with enthusiasm, but some describe ECHO as too rigid – an instrument in the child protection issue where the principle of life saving is not really applicable. Working in Child Protection requires specific, continuing training.

For the partners, it is clear that the number of children who come through the ICC is not the only factor—the psychological state of the children is also important. Partners emphasise that a single child can mobilise an agent for several days or even weeks, whereas four other children will need only relatively little support.

In ECHO's defence, the mission was affected by the lack of drive of certain partners, who do not always seem to have a clear strategy and who are not getting ready for the post-ECHO period by looking for financing.

## **6.4. Impact**

### *6.4.1. General remarks*

The most important impact is that the children are separated from the adult combatants and are provided with a safe environment, given appropriate medical-psychological-social assistance, respecting his/her culture and religion. The child gets education again. He/she can go through an accelerated course, thanks to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), return to traditional schools or take vocational training. In general, there is comprehension and respect for the child's suffering. An ex-combatant is perceived more as a victim than a perpetrator.

The quality of the work with the children in the ICC is variable and depends on the quality of the training the carers received and therefore the availability of expatriate staff.

It is too early to measure the long-term impact of the programmes. Above all, an assessment is needed of the quality of the integration of children in their family and the community.

### *6.4.2. Strong points*

- The children are provided with a safe environment, in which the child has the time and care to begin the healing of physical and mental scars. The child is not treated as a psychiatric case; he/she can become a child again. Due to limited resources and the large number of children to be aided, it is hard to deal with them individually and to devise a custom-made solution.
- As a result, the interventions are based on the resources of the individual, the family and the community. The resilience principle is used. The individual is not reduced to a set of problems, but his/her hidden potential is brought forward.
- The programme is community-based. The community is made aware of the problems of these children, with respect for the hierarchy in the community. Awareness must go through the paramount chief, who will encourage the community to adopt an attitude of openness and acceptance with regard to children in difficulty. In a way, the community is not excluded from aid. For example, when the child is integrated in a school, fees will not be paid, but the school will receive a grant intended for all the children.
- Foster Family Associations take part in selecting and training foster families. Their work is also to identify children who are suffering in families and to refer them to health care workers if necessary.
- Generally speaking, caregivers and social workers are easygoing with regard to the youngsters' behavioural disorders and they meet aggressiveness with understanding, and defining of limits. The social workers show a real commitment and, for the most part, express real feelings of empathy for these young people.
- A very strong point for SC is the work they do with the RUF commanders. SC established a contact with the RUF commanders and hold workshops with the children and their commanders. The aim of these workshops is to get the commanders' support for the DDR programme and to encourage the children to leave the RUF and join their family.
- In the SCF ICC, the children are involved, heard and considered in all things that affect them, including the day-to-day activities and methods working in the ICC. A child leader has been nominated by the children, to be a general advocate for children's issues and to represent children in other meetings or procedures.
- The work is well co-ordinated with the MSWGCA, the child protection agencies, the other national or international NGOs, schools, etc.

### *6.4.3. Shortcomings*

- Some children are reunified with their family/foster family without an assessment of the child and the family. As a result, the child runs away. In the best cases, he returns to the ICC or becomes a street child. UNICEF has given guidelines for the selection of the foster families, but they are not always respected.
- In the ICC centres (except COOPI), there is not enough support for young mothers and their children. Even the long-term consequences of rape/gang rape are minimised.

- The social workers have difficulty admitting failures. They show a kind of blindness for problems such as: the consequences of rape and the stigma put on it by the population; the risk of sexual, physical and emotional abuse/exploitation of the child when reunified in his family/foster family; drug problems about the ex-combatants, the impact of HIV/AIDS, etc.
  - Not all the children will be successfully reunified with their family, due to the loss of parents and guardians, family rejection, etc. UNICEF complains of the low rate of follow-up visits made by the social workers after the reintegration process. Children placed in foster families are more at risk of child abuse and neglect.
  - No analyse of databases is available. Research could help to adjust the therapeutic work.
  - Capacity building: except for COOPI, capacity building is insufficient. There is a large turnover in expatriate staff, which means that there is no continuity in the training. The national staff rightly complains about this issue. Tension is perceptible between the national staff and the expatriates in certain projects. The national staffs have very little literature, no reading work is done with them, and few reference materials are made available for them. They are trained to function on a daily basis with the children and no more. There is no exchange of expertise between the NGOs. For example, SC does a very interesting job with the RUF and COOPI has specialised in working with sexually abused girls. It seems that most of the social workers are willing to receive real training.
- The possibility of burnout in social workers and the healing of their trauma are not considered. The mission wonders whether the expatriates themselves are not subject to burn-out, given the huge job before them and the predictable difficulties of reintegrating these young people into society.

A very important problem is that posed by the concept of 'forgiveness'. The NCDDR, the government spokesman, recommends reconciliation of enemy citizens as well as civil peace. It also encourages the population to forgive the atrocities committed, to the extent that talking about the suffering is almost prohibited. Reconciliation concludes the political disorder caused by the civil war. According to C. Ricoeur<sup>1</sup>, "The institution of amnesty can only correspond to an emergency social therapy, in the name of utility, not of truth." The social workers stimulate forgiveness and ask victims of rape and amputation, etc. to forgive in the name of peace. For the victim, forgiveness in itself is not necessary for survival, whereas recognition of the injustice he has incurred and recognition of his symptoms as a normal reaction to an abnormal situation are. The therapeutic work will also consist of helping the individual to give meaning to the atrocities committed, which may possibly help remove or decrease the other's responsibility. But the victim is the one who must decide if he/she can forgive. Forgiveness is probably a survival strategy, but it prevents the use of deeper psychotherapeutic work.

It is important to encourage a work on memory, plus mourning and guided by a feeling of forgiveness.

Girls who were victims of rape are at high risk of HIV infection. The problem is not tackled at all. This reaction must be understood in the Sierra Leone context, where HIV/AIDS tests are not readily available and treatment is non-existent. In coordination with WHO and UNICEF, the Ministry of Health has scheduled an epidemiological analysis of the incidence of HIV/AIDS.

#### 6.4.4. Cost-effectiveness

It is hard to analyse cost-effectiveness. The international NGOs are generally involved in all the DDR programmes, while ECHO only supports the immediate costs of the ICC and, in the case of CAD, the group homes and foster care. UNICEF supports the tracing, reunification and reintegration. ECHO determined that the most appropriate way to offer support was in terms of expatriates, logistic and communications – areas where UNICEF would not be able to provide funding. Clearly then, ECHO offers indirect support to all aspects of the programme, since expatriates are responsible for the entire programme.

The mission estimates that in all likelihood equivalent results could have been obtained with fewer expatriates, since they do not focus sufficiently on training of national staff (except for COOPI) and spend too little time in the field. Part of the budget could have been devoted to a research project, in collaboration with a local university, on the problems of trauma among child combatants.

## 6.5. Sustainability

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<sup>1</sup> C. Ricoeur, *La Mémoire, L'Histoire et L'Oubli*, Seuil, 2000

The quality of reintegration of young people in their families/foster families/community is in direct correlation with:

- the political evolution of the country;
- the link with the EC child protection budget line should be encouraged – MSWGCA is unable to meet these needs and the child protection issue should be encouraged;
- reduction of poverty: poverty is partially responsible for the war, the enrolment of children, intra-family abuse, the existence of street children, etc;
- training of social workers: it is vital to give more specialised training courses in the child protection sector.