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# Child protection program and local communities in the Western Area of Sierra Leone

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# 1 Introduction

The research reported here is based on the study done in Freetown, the main city of Sierra Leone, from August to December 2001 and it is promoted by the Italian NGO, Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI). COOPI has been working in Sierra Leone since 1967, and after the rebel attack to Freetown on January 1999, has become the leading agency for the implementation of the UNICEF child protection program in the country Western Area .

The aim of this study is twofold. First to identify and organize the lessons learnt by COOPI during the three years of program implementation . The experience of COOPI in the reintegration process of child soldiers is a valuable resource that requires to be systematized, in order to be a term of references for other projects.

The second objective is to present the response of the local community to the COOPI program. The research aims at estimating the impact of the child protection on the local community in the Western Area. The intention is that the results of this study, although limited in terms of time and scope, will provide useful information in order to define the new strategy of the program in the post-emergency phase.

The report is organized as follows. First the UN studies done on the child protection issues, in particular about the child soldiers reintegration are briefly summarized, in order to present the theoretical frame in which the Sierra Leone program has been born and developed (Chapter 2). Second some background of the country, from the historical, political and economical perspectives, and the main phases of the international community intervention is introduced (Chapter 3). Then the analysis of the COOPI program, focusing on the lessons learnt, is presented and studied as the effort to apply the UN theoretical frame to the particular case of the child soldiers in Sierra Leone (Chapter 4). The community based research is reported separately for the case of two different areas Lakka and Calaba Town of the COOPI intervention (Chapter 5). Finally some concluding remarks (Section 6) prelude the recommendations for a new strategy in the post-emergency phase of the child protection program (Section 7).

## **2 Impact of armed conflicts on children**

Since the increasing number of conflicts during the last decades, many studies have been done to evaluate the impact of armed conflicts on children and civilians. The reference document is the report *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, submitted to the November 1996 regular session of the United Nations General Assembly by Graca Machel, a Secretary General Expert on the subject. This document, founded by the United Nations Center for Human Rights (now Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), by the United Children Fund and by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, has focused the World attention on the issues of the war affected children. The researches, done in the last 5 years, by experts, governments and civil society organizations has resulted in the definition of a complete agenda for the child protection strategies in a war contest. In this section are presented the main results regarding the child soldiers issues. The aim is to highlight the characteristic of the modern conflict, the reasons of the use of children in war, and finally the UN strategy for the children disarmament and reintegration in the society.

### **2.1 Patterns and characteristics of contemporary armed conflicts**

Violent conflict has always made victims of non-combatants. The patterns and characteristics of contemporary armed conflicts, however, have increased the risks for children, turning civilians into primary targets of war. In the last decade around 2 million children have been killed in armed conflict, three times as many have been seriously injured or permanently disabled, and countless others have been forced to witness or even to take part in horrifying acts of violence.

In the Graca Machel review 1996-2000, *A critical Analysis of Progress Made and Obstacles Encountered in Increasing Protection for War –Affected Children*, presented to the General Secretariat on 23 January 2001 the main causes of the modern conflict are identified in:

the fight for the resources control: diamonds have funded the wars in Liberia, Angola and Sierra Leone. Oil supports the civil war in Sudan, the narco-traffic in Colombia.

the link to the global market: the legal and illegal global market make war highly profitable. No modern conflict could exist without the link to the global market, in particular to the international market of weapons.

the structural adjustments: rigorous programs of structural adjustment promise long-term market-based economic growth, but demands for immediate cuts in budget deficits and public expenditure

only weaken already fragile States, leaving them dependent on forces and relations over which they have little control.

Vestiges of colonialism and persistent economic, social and political crises have greatly contributed to the disintegration of public order. Undermined by internal dissent, countries caught up in conflict today are also under severe stress from a global world economy that pushes them ever further towards the margins. While many developing countries have made considerable economic progress in recent decades, the benefits have often been spread unevenly, leaving millions of people struggling for survival. The collapse of functional Governments in many countries torn by internal fighting and the erosion of essential service structures have fomented inequalities, grievances, and strife. The personalization of power and leadership and the manipulation of ethnicity and religion to serve personal or narrow group interests have had similarly debilitating effects on countries in conflict.

The Graca Machel report points the changing character of modern warfare:

1. All of today's wars are being fought not between States but within them, among rebel, paramilitary and government armies. Generally the armed groups lack of a clear structure and military hierarchy, leading to the lack of control and the sense of dislocation and chaos that characterize contemporary armed conflicts .
2. Distinctions between combatants and civilians disappear in battles fought from village to village or from street to street. In recent decades, the proportion of war victims who are civilians has leaped dramatically from 5 per cent to over 90 per cent. In many cases religious and ethnic affiliations are being manipulated to heighten feelings of hatred or aggression against children as well as adults. The civilians became the preferred targets.
3. The armies used are light weapons, cheap and widely available in the international arms trade. This kind of weapons promotes high mobility warfare, based on hit and run attacks.
4. Unbridled attacks on civilians and rural communities have provoked mass exoduses and the displacement of entire populations who flee conflict in search of elusive sanctuaries within and outside their national borders. Among these uprooted millions, it is estimated that 80 per cent are children and women.

## 2.2 Child soldiers

One of the most alarming trends in armed conflict is the participation of children as soldiers. A series of 24 case studies on the use of children as soldiers prepared for the Graca Machel report, covering conflicts over the past 30 years, indicate that government or rebel armies around the world have recruited tens of thousands of children.

A child soldier is defined each boy or girl, younger than 18 years, that has been forcedly or voluntarily recruited by regular armies, by paramilitary groups, civil defense units or rebel groups. Currently more than 300.000 child soldiers are used in conflicts, most are adolescent, though many are 10 years of age or younger.

In the new war strategy the use of children has become very efficient for two main reasons. The first is a technological reason. Previously, the more dangerous weapons were heavy or complex, but the guns of the modern conflict are so light that children can use them, and so simple that they can be stripped and reassembled by a child of 10. In the old war the military equipment was expensive, on the contrary the AK-47 used in the modern conflicts are so cheap that in some area of West Africa can be purchased for a cost of a chicken. The second is a psychological reason. Unlike the adults children are free from any remora in fighting since they have a weaker sense of reality. Far from the family, children are extremely faithful to the armed group, which became a substitute of the family itself. Some commanders have even noted the desirability of child soldiers because they are "more obedient, do not question orders and are easier to manipulate than adult soldiers".

Child soldiers are recruited in many different ways. Some are conscripted, others are press-ganged or kidnapped and still others are forced to join armed groups to defend their families. In addition to being forcibly recruited, youth also present themselves for service. It is misleading, however, to consider this voluntary. While young people may appear to choose military service, the choice is not exercised freely. They may be driven by any of several forces, including cultural, social, economic or political pressures. The main are the following:

1. **economic reasons:** hunger and poverty may drive parents to offer their children for service. In some cases, armies pay a minor soldier's wages directly to the family. Children themselves may volunteer if they believe that this is the only way to guarantee regular meals, clothing or medical attention.



2. **social reasons:** being a soldier can be seen as the only possibility to improve the social condition. The young people look in the military life a way to learn a job and to exit from the emargination, finding in the army a new identity.
3. **need of protection:** some children feel obliged to become soldiers for their own protection. Faced with violence and chaos all around, they decide they are safer with guns in their hands. Often such children join armed opposition groups after experiencing harassment from government forces, or vice-versa.
4. **cultural and ideological reasons :** in some societies, military life may be the most attractive option, and war activities are glorified. In Sierra Leone, the expert met with child soldiers who proudly defended the number of "enemies" they had killed. Moreover The lure of ideology is particularly strong in early adolescence, when young people are developing personal identities and searching for a sense of social meaning. Children are very impressionable and may even be lured into cults of martyrdom. However, it is important to note that children may also identify with and fight for social causes, religious expression, self-determination or national liberation.

The categories more at risk of recruitment are identified in the children from the poor sectors of the society, the children living in the area of the conflict and the separated children. The poor children are less protected from the recruitment raids, and they are often excluded by the educational system and thus more susceptible to volunteer in the army. The children living in the conflict area, face a situation of social disgregation due to the war. The resulting poverty and the daily experience of violence make the military life the only way to have a safe life . Finally the separated children are particularly vulnerable since there is no family to physically and psychologically protect them from the recruitment.

Once recruited as soldiers, children generally receive much the same treatment as adults - including the often brutal induction ceremonies. Many start out in support functions which entail great risk and hardship. One of the common tasks assigned to children is to serve as porters, guards, lookouts and messengers. Children are also used for household and other routine duties, working in the gardens, hunting for wild fruits and vegetables and looting food from gardens and granaries. Girls perform the same functions as boys, and are forced to provide sexual services. Girls can be victim of collective rapes or , in other cases, they become property of one soldier that behaves as their protector.

While children of both sexes might start out in indirect support functions, it does not take long before they are placed in the heat of battle. Here, their inexperience and lack of training leave them particularly exposed. The youngest children rarely appreciate the perils they face. A number of case studies report that when the shelling starts the children get over-excited and forget to take cover. Some commanders deliberately exploit such fearlessness in children, even plying them with alcohol or drugs. The progressive involvement of youth in acts of extreme violence desensitizes them to suffering. In a number of cases, young people have been deliberately exposed to horrific scenes. Such experience makes children more likely to commit violent acts themselves and may contribute to a break with society.

### **2.3 Disarmament and Reintegration**

Clearly one of the most urgent priorities is to remove everyone under 18 years of age from armed forces. Peace agreements and related documents should incorporate provisions for demobilization of children; without this recognition, there can be no effective planning or programming on a national scale.

In the disarmament and reintegration process it must be remembered that children experience violent events while separated from their families. This separation, occurring at a time when they have most need of the family care, has a strong impact on children. At the time of demobilization, the children may be confused by their situation, or indeed reluctant to relinquish their identity as soldier. This can result in a sense of abandonment or rejection. Regardless of the circumstances, many of the children may have identified with the army or armed group that protected and provided for them. Demobilization may represent yet another loss for the children, which may influence their behavior. Child soldiers may find it difficult to disengage from the idea that violence is a legitimate means of achieving one's aims. It is thus important that the next stage for the child of social reintegration is based upon a process of re-attachment to their families and communities.

Effective social reintegration depends upon support from families and communities. But families are also worn down by conflict, both physically and emotionally, and face increased impoverishment. The field visits and research done for the Graca Machel report and for the study of Save the Children on the child soldier issue (*Rethinking the trauma of war*) repeatedly stressed the importance of links between education, vocational opportunities for former child combatants and the economic security of their families. These are most often the determinants of successful social reintegration and, importantly, they are the factors that prevent re-recruitment.

Education, and especially the completion of primary schooling, must be a high priority. For a former child soldier, education is more than a route to employment. It also helps to normalize life and to develop an identity separate from that of the soldier. The development of peer relationships and improved self-esteem may also be facilitated through recreational and cultural activities. A difficulty to be faced is the likelihood that former combatants may have fallen far behind in their schooling, and may be placed in classes with much younger children. Specific measures may be required, such as establishing special classes for former child soldiers who can then progressively be reintegrated into regular schools. For older children especially, effective education will require strong components of training in life-skills and vocational opportunity. Preparing older children to find employment will not only help them survive, but may also facilitate their acceptance at home and provide them with a sense of meaning and identity.

Understanding the situation of child soldiers as a continuum, that includes their experience before and after recruitment, not only their experiences as soldiers, shifts the focus of concern so that interventions to address the psychological consequences of their traumatic experiences are an aspect of, and not central to, efforts to address their situation. Reichenberg and Friedman in 1996 wrote in *“Traumatized children. Healing the invisible wounds of children in war: a right approach”*:

“If according to the best interest of the child, children and their families are positioned at the center of all strategies to close the gap between reality and the optimum environment for full development, then a model that treats symptoms rather than empowers whole human beings may be inadequate and counter-productive....The medical model.....tends to universalize a Western notion of child development which, even by using the term trauma, pathologizes children’s invisible wounds and views them only as passive victims rather than active survivors.”

Whilst not minimizing the impact of traumatic events, it must be recognized that children’s responses may be influenced as much, if not more, by their experiences of family loss and separation, and the precarious nature of the family life that results from conflict. Thus the reintegration program, defined in the last 5 years by UNICEF and its NGO implementing partners, has a community based approach, considering the families and communities as the most important agents for the children reintegration.

## **2.4 International legal protection for children in armed conflicts**

There are two kinds of international law in relation to child soldiers: the international human rights law, and the international humanitarian law . The international human rights law is *erga omnes* and *Jus cogens* , thus it is applicable to every human beings in any situation; on the contrary the international humanitarian law is the specific law applicable to the conduct of armed conflicts. The

application of the international humanitarian law treaties depends on whether there is an actual armed conflict or not, whether it is an international or non-international one, and whether the State concerned is a party to the particular treaty.

#### **2.4.1 The rights of child soldiers as children**

First the child soldiers are children, and as children they have the rights described in the international human rights law. Inside this international code, constituted by customs and by Conventions signed and ratified by States, there are groups of laws specifically addressed to the rights of children and there are others addressed to the rights of children in particular situations: child workers, separated children, child soldiers. There are two Conventions and one optional protocol regarding directly children issues:

Convention on the Rights of the Child , UN 1989, in force since 1990, ratified by all the States with the exception of USA and Somalia.

ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention 182, 1999

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN 2000, with 80 States that have signed and 5 States that have ratified in June 2001 .

The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child in the article 1 as a person that has not attained the age of eighteen years. However in the Article 38 allows the States to use the children as soldiers if they are older than fifteen years, with the statement:

“ 38.2 ) States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities.”

Thus there is an ambiguity in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that did not raise the age to take part in hostilities to 18 years, in line with the general definition of "childhood" in Article 1 of the Convention. Whereas the Convention increased the protection and rights of children in other respects, it failed to do so in this area. In addition to the prohibition on recruitment of children under 15 years and their participation in hostilities, both Additional Protocol I (Art. 77) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art. 38.3) require States which recruit those in the 15 to 18 year age group to "endeavor to give priority to those who are oldest".

ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention 182 was adopted on 16 June 1999 and came into force on 19 November 2000. It commits each state which ratifies it to "*take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor as a matter of*

*urgency*". The term "child" applies to all persons under the age of 18 years and the worst forms of child labor include: "all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict". The Recommendation accompanying Convention 182 encourages states to make such recruitment a criminal offence. This was the first time that an 18-year minimum age limit was set in relation to child soldiering in an international treaty. It was also the first specific, legal recognition of child soldiering as a form of child labor.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 May 2000. It was intended to raise the minimum recruitment and participation age from the 15 years in the Convention to 18 years. It took 6 years to complete and even now the result is not entirely satisfactory. Although the minimum age is raised from 15 to 18 for participation in hostilities for all recruitment into armed groups (Art 4.1. *Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years*), and for compulsory recruitment by governments (Art 2: *States Parties shall ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 years are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces*), states may continue to accept volunteers from the age of 16. In the Article 1, of this protocol :*"States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities"*, remains the ambiguity around the distinction between to take direct or not direct part in the hostilities. " Direct participation in hostilities" was explained in relation to the provisions in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Using children for direct participation in combat refers to any active participation in military activities linked to combat such as scouting, spying, sabotage and the use of children as decoys, couriers or at military checkpoints. It would not cover activities clearly unrelated to the hostilities such as food deliveries to an airbase or the use of domestic staff in an officer's married accommodation. However, use of children in a direct support function such as acting as bearers to take supplies to the front line, or activities at the front line itself, would be included within the terminology. Thus the distinction remains unclear, and the Protocols allows a kind of "indirect" participation in hostilities, that can be very dangerous. Moreover the children involved in this "indirect" participation loose the state of ex-combatants with the related rights.

### **2.4.2 The rights of child soldiers during conflicts**

The international humanitarian law addresses the rights of child soldiers considered as part of civil society affected by a conflict or as combatants. The international humanitarian law is constituted by the four Geneva Conventions (1949), the two Additional Protocols (1977), and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998).

The rights of the civil society and children involved in a conflict are addressed in the IV Convention, and in the I Protocol in the case of international conflicts and in the II Protocol in the case of national conflicts. The rights of combatants and ex-combatants are addressed in the III Convention. Child soldiers enter in this category and they have all the rights of combatants. Moreover the child soldiers younger than 15 years have the right to a special protection, since they are children (Art 77 par 3 I Prot., Art 4. Par 3. II Prot.).

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court specifies that it is an international crime for any person to recruit children under 15 years or to use them in hostilities, whether in an international or a non-international (internal) armed conflict and whether or not they are acting on behalf of a government. Once in force, when 60 States have become parties to it, this could be one of the most effective measures in curbing the use of younger children including by armed opposition groups since it will make individuals criminally accountable for their actions. Although the Statute uses the terminology of "conscription" or "enlistment" of under-15s, this is accepted as meaning the same as "recruitment" in the other treaties. Moreover when the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child will be into force, it will be possible to extend the children protection standard from 15 to 18 years.

### **3 The case of Sierra Leone**

The conflict in Sierra Leone, which started in 1991, has resulted in mass displacement of civilians, destruction of infrastructures and homes, looting and terrible atrocities inflicted on the civil population. Children have been displaced, exposed to traumatic events, loss of family members; they have been abducted and used as combatants. Thousands of children became combatants as a result of abduction by Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Some joined the RUF because of the lack of alternatives within a situation of chronic poverty. Many of these child combatants were involved in front line fighting and in committing atrocities, girls were raped and used by the rebels as “wives”.

Following the signing of the Lome Peace Agreement on July 2000, the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration began planning for the reintegration of 45.000 combatants of the Armed Forces of Sierra Leone (SLA), Civil Defense forces (CDF), Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and other paramilitary units. The Commission estimated 5.400 children associated with the rebel forces, but the number could be much higher. Only during the attack on Freetown in January 1999, 4000 cases of missing children have been reported.

The aim of this section is to briefly present the context of Sierra Leone from an economical, social and political point of view, through the analysis of the Interim Reduction Strategy Paper, that has been presented by the Government on June 2001. More information about the historical background, and the economy structure can be found in the Country Profile 1999-2000, edited by the Economist Intelligent Unit (EIU), while for the most recent updating it is possible to refer to the Country Report, on September 2001, EIU. This analysis of the country is necessary in order to contextualize the general discussion about the child soldiers presented in the previous section, and to analyze, in the next section, how the guideline defined by the UN report have been applied by UNICEF and COOPI to the case of child soldiers in Sierra Leone.

#### **3.1 Ten years of civil war**

Sierra Leone has had five general elections and five military coups since independence in 1961. The source of instability lies less in ethnic rivalry than in the country’s principal economic resource – high quality alluvial diamonds. Since independence the political system in Sierra Leone has

increasingly presented the facade of a capital city which cloaks a real political scene of unaccountable and highly localized deals between national political brokers, local landowners and various expatriate diamond merchants and mining supervisors (mainly of Lebanese, Guinean and Nigerian origin, but also including Israelis, Europeans and Americans). While Siaka Stevens, Sierra Leone's most powerful president who held office from 1968 to 1985, was able to build the semblance of a one-party state machine, by the military control of the diamond Kono district, during the 1980s the system starts to shaky. During the 1980s the system yielded less and less of the revenue necessary to buy social tranquillity though educational patronage and redistribution of cheap imported food, in large part because the Kono alluvials were being depleted.

The civil war in Sierra Leone began on 23 March 1991. The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF) sought to mobilize unemployed youth to overthrow the one-party regime of President Joseph Momoh, established in 1985. The RUF was led by a cashiered army corporal, Foday Saybana Sankoh, trained as a guerrilla in Libya. The RUF established itself in the Liberia border region (Kailahun and Kono districts) that was politically alienated from the Momoh regime. Initially a force of no more than few hundred, the RUF brought in hired Liberian fighters whose atrocities against civilians lost the movement any local political support. The Liberian President Charles Taylor helped finance the RUF guerrilla, in order to increase his control on the diamond-rich border regions.

Disowned by local civilians, the RUF turned instead to training young people abducted from border mining districts, some of them were hijacked from run-down primary and secondary schools, others were rounded up from alluvial mining pits. Some young people joined the RUF only to survive, but to others the movement spoke to many of their problems and frustrations. Only those abductees with education were taken for guerilla training, other captives were used as slave labor. In opposition to the RUF was an ill-equipped government army, the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF), that began to copy RUF guerrilla tactics, including recruitment and training of under-age irregulars.

In April 1992 a pay revolt by junior officers quickly escalated into a coup. The new regime of Capt. Valentine Strasser, began to renovate the façade of the state, encouraging the frustrated street youth courted by the RUF to demonstrate their ability by cleaning and painting the cities. The army was re-equipped and transformed. Fighting strength was increased from about 2.500 combatants when the war began to an estimated 15.000 by 1994. Many of the new intake were from the socially disadvantaged classes courted by the RUF. The government quickly lost control of its enlarged but low-trained army. Soldiers and officials start to be engaged in mining of alluvial diamonds.



Military officers would declare zone off-limits and drive out civilians while undertaking ‘sweeps’ against the RUF, but in reality digging for diamonds. Some rogue officers seemingly conspired to buy diamonds from RUF groups in return for weapons. Other units faked rebel attacks in order to loot. The irregulars recruited at the war front, however, proved to be militarily effective, pinning the RUF into a last redoubt in Nomo Chiefdom on the Liberian border by December 1993. Many of the locally-recruited irregulars were fighting to revenge family members killed by Liberian Special Forces during the initial RUF invasion of 1991.

The war continued in a low key. RUF maintained a low-level struggle based in isolated camps in the resource-rich Gola Forest segment of the Liberian border. Having little faith in the government army, citizen civil defense groups began to mobilize to protect rural areas against both RUF pockets and army renegade units. The civil defense groups frequently drew upon the skills, both practical and esoteric, of local hunters known in Mende language as *kamajo*.

Later in 1994, refreshed by diamond mining, raids and weapons deals the RUF renewed its campaign, launching hit-and-run raids on all parts of the country from forward bases in forested districts. By March 1995 Freetown was coming under pressure. A total of 17 expatriate hostages were also abducted, bringing greater international attention to the war. The government split over the international pressure to building a peace process. Strasser was replaced in January 1996 by Capt. Julius Maada Bio in a palace coup, and Bio was steered by diplomatic pressure and public protest towards elections.

The Sierra Leone People Party (SLPP) candidate, Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah, a former UN bureaucrat, won the election for president. Kabbah continued the peace process initiated between Bio and Sankoh, resulting in a comprehensive peace plan, signed on November 30<sup>th</sup> 1996 in Abidjan. The plan offered demobilization and rehabilitation opportunities to ex-combatants and some scope for RUF political ambition. However neither party seems to be sincere. The government, suspicious of the army, reinforced the *kamajo* groups, transforming them in a ethnically-based militia, later officially named Civil Defense Force (CDF), of 25.000 recruits by the end of 1996. The CDF units never observed the cease-fire, the RUF responded by re-arming, apparently still supported by its long term international backers, Libia and Liberia. The Nigerian authorities then removed the charismatic Foday Sankoh arresting him on a visit to Nigeria.

On May 25<sup>th</sup> 1997 a group of army mutineers led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma overthrew Mr. Kabbah, with the support of the marginalised army, afraid that it had lost its political influence to the Kamajo civil defense militia. The Koroma regime tried to end the war by inviting the RUF to

leave its bush and taste power. Mr Sankoh, in detention in Nigeria, signaled his agreement; but the resulting junta was ostracized internationally and was unable to govern effectively. In October 1997 the Koroma-led junta agreed for the reinstatement of Mr. Kabbah within six months. Evidence that the timetable was slipping provided the pretext for the intervention of the Nigerian-led military force, the Economic community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Group (Ecomog), in February 1998. Ecomog was supported by Kamajo militia units and UK mercenaries. UK contributions to the international campaign to restore democratic government to Sierra Leone were somewhat besmirched by subsequent revelations of a close nexus between UK diplomacy, recruitment of UK mercenaries and long-term UK business interest in concessions granted by the Kabbah government to mine kimberlite diamonds. Mr Kabbah returned to the capital as president on March 1998. Some army elements in the junta surrendered, but hardcore RUF elements quickly retreated to their forest bases, which they had prudently provisioned during the period of junta rule.

International backers-now apparently including east European mining-cum-security interest- re-armed and reinforced the rebels. Combining with dissident elements from the government army, the RUF then retook Kono and swept down through the north of the country towards Freetown. The RUF took over large parts of the city on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1999.

After this attack the international community sent 11000 UN soldiers in the mission UNAMSIL, UN army mission in Sierra Leone. The dialogue between the government and RUF started , leading to the signing of the Lomé peace accord on 7 July 1999. The accord provided not only a framework for the resolution of the hostilities but also bound the parties to the principle of unhindered humanitarian access. The signing of the Lomé peace Agreement raised hopes that the end of the war was in sight. Until the first quarter of the year 2000 the peace process remained on track. The deployment by April of 7000 UN peacekeepers approved by UN Security Council facilitate humanitarian access to a greater number of war affected civilians, particularly in the RUF held areas in the northern and eastern provinces. However in May 2000 the peace process rapidly deteriorated, following a series of RUF attacks on UN peacekeepers. The RUF, claiming that RUF was forcibly disarming its men, destroyed the Disarmament , Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) camps in Makeni and took 500 UN peacekeepers hostage in Makeni. As result the DDR process came to a standstill; the power sharing arrangement envisage under the LPA collapsed; and former fighting groups rearmed and aligned with pro-government forces to Fight the RUF. Sierra Leone returned to conditions comparable to a civil war. The brief deployment on 7 May of British troops stabilized the situation, and allowed UN civilian and NGO staff to come back to Freetown. The UNAMSIL strength to 13.0000. Moreover on 5 July 2000 the Security Council passed a resolution imposing a

global embargo on diamond exports from Sierra Leone until the government is in a position to set up a proper certification system, as well as regain access to diamond mining areas currently under the RUF. This embargo and the presence of British troops established the security situation.

### **3.2 The Macro-economic Situation**

Sierra Leone has massive potential wealth in mineral and marine resources, yet it is one of the poorest countries in the world. The economy has seen a marked deceleration in growth since the 1960s, and severe stagnation and recession since the early 1980s. Even before the insurgency the economy had suffered from decades of corruption and mismanagement. The World Bank put the country's average GDP growth rate at 3.7% between 1965 and 1973, decreasing to 1.8% between 1974 and 1984 and falling again to -3.6 in 1995. The drop in GDP figures is partly attributable to the war-related disruption of both agriculture and mining activities, although evaluation problems, the difficulties of data collection and the size of the parallel market in Sierra Leone mean that such statistics are subject to a wide margin of error.

While the return of civilian rule in 1996 seemed to herald the prospect of an improvement in the economy, Sierra Leone's economic performance in recent years has been adversely hampered by the still difficult security situation. The unstable political and security situation, especially since the 1997 coup, disrupted economic activities resulting in sharp contractions in output. Real GDP growth declined, on average, by nearly 8% from 1997 to 1999. Real GDP in 2000 was, according to the IMF, US\$636m, which was only around 84% of GDP in 1990, the last pre-war year. This dismal growth performance is reflected in low savings and investment rates as well as weak fiscal and external sector positions. This has resulted in high unemployment levels and declining per capita incomes. The government data report a collapse of 40% of the GDP pro capita in the last 10 years, from US\$237 in 1990 to US\$142 in 2000.

The country continues to face an unsustainably large external debt. External debt, including arrears, is estimated at about \$1.2 billion or 188% of GDP in 2000. Debt service payments (excluding debt relief) are estimated at 47.8% of export of goods and non-factor services. As at end 2000, preliminary estimates of the net present value (NPV) of external debt to exports, GDP and domestic budget revenue were, respectively, 709.3%, 125.3% and 1095.4%. The debt burden militates against a sustainable economic recovery since it crowds out investments, particularly in education and health.

In the following tables the annual indicators of the Sierra Leone Economic structure are reported.

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
GDP at market prices (le bn)	867.1	834.5	1.209,6	1.209,6	1.330,4
Real GDP growth (%)	6.1	-17.6	-0.1	-8.1	3.8
Consumer price inflation (av:%)	23.1	14.9	35.5	34.1	0.1
Population (m)	4.3	4.4	4.6	4.7	4.7
Exports fob (US \$m)	43.1	36.2	26.7	25.2	29.0
Imports fob (US \$m)	265.4	116.5	122.2	101.6	160.5
Current-account balance (US \$m)	-161.6	-27.5	-66.2	-33.8	-112.3
Reverses excl gold (US \$ m)	26.6	38.5	44.1	39.5	50.9
Total external debt-service ratio, due (%)	1.179	1.144	1.256	1.249	1.301
External debt-service ratio, due (%)	45.3	19.5	27.5	29.9	52.0
Diamond exports (US \$m)	60	65	65	70	70
Exchange rate (av; Le:US\$)	920.7	981.7	1.563.6	1.804,2	2.092,1

Origin of gross domestic product 1999	% of total	Components of gross domestic product	% of total
Agriculture	58.4	Private consumption	94.3
Industry	16.6	Government consumption	13.1
Manufacturing	12.7	Gross fixed investment	0.3
Services	21.9	Exports of goods & services	14.3
Import duties	3.1	Imports of goods & services	22.0
GDP at factor cost	100.0	GDP at market price	100.0

### 3.3 The poverty and social situation

A major constraint for poverty analysis, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation is the paucity of up-to-date socio-economic information. This prevents a more thorough and detailed analysis of the current poverty situation in the country. The last household survey was conducted in 1989/90 and the results of that survey were used to prepare Poverty Profiles for Sierra Leone in 1994. These poverty profiles were prepared using the International Standard definition of poverty; those who spend less than one US dollar per day. Information on the incidence and severity of poverty obtained from these poverty profiles by area is provided in Tables below. The value of the headcount index P0 is the proportion of the population with monthly per capita expenditures below the defined poverty line of US\$1 per day. The value of the depth of poverty P1 is indicative of the expenditures spending shortfall of the poor relative to the defined poverty line, while the severity index P2 is related to the depth of poverty but reflecting the weights of the poorest more heavily than the less poor. The tables show that in 1990 poverty in Sierra Leone was pervasive and endemic, 81% of the population was living with less than US\$1 per day. The shortfall in income/consumption levels of all the poor persons in the country relative to the poverty line was estimated at 58.6% for the entire country in 1990. In other words, an average income level of all the poor was insufficient to cover about 50% of the minimum household food requirements. Though poverty affects all regions in the country, it was largely a rural phenomenon with higher level in the Northern region. In the last decade, the destruction of economic activity, destruction of physical and social infrastructure and the internal and external displacement of the population caused by the civil conflict has increased the incidence, depth and severity of poverty as well as altered the regional distribution of poverty.

Table 2.3: Rural Urban Poverty Indices

Region of residence	Population share (%)	Poverty indices			Contribution of poverty (%)		
		P0	P1	P2	P0	P1	P2
Rural	65.4	0.883	0.731	0.654	57.1	69.8	74.2
Small town	33.5	0.709	0.404	0.296	18.5	12.5	10.9
Large town	1.2	0.766	0.435	0.307	24.3	17.7	14.9
All SL	100.0	0.816	0.586	0.489	100	100	100

Table 2.4: Provincial Poverty Indices

Region of residence	Population share (%)	Poverty indices			Contribution of poverty (%)		
		P0	P1	P2	P0	P1	P2
Eastern	26.4	0.800	0.557	0.465	25.9	24.6	24.6
Northern	35.4	0.857	0.650	0.553	37.2	41.2	42.0
Western	15.9	0.808	0.509	0.393	15.7	13.6	12.6
Southern	22.3	0.775	0.567	0.479	21.3	20.6	20.8
All SL	100	0.816	0.586	0.489	100	100	100

Regarding the non-income aspects of poverty the situation of Sierra Leone does not improve. The conflict has worsened the situation in the education sector. A survey conducted by the National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (NCRRR) on the restoration of Government in March 1998 shows that the destruction to educational facilities include 1,270 primary schools, 820 secondary, tertiary and vocational schools, three teachers training colleges and the Njala University College. The consequences of this damage and deterioration are reflected in a recent UNDP Human Development Report 1998. The report shows that only three out of every ten Sierra Leoneans can read and write compared to a sub-Saharan average of 6 out of 10. School in the safe area as the Western Area are overcrowded with a pupil teacher ratio at the primary level of over 60:1, due to the massive displacement of population.

The illiteracy rate amongst women is not only very high 89%, but significantly higher than that for men, that is 69%. This is due mainly to their lower school enrollment ( 38% for girl with respect 52% for boys), higher dropout rates, early marriages, higher household demand for female labor and teenage pregnancies.

A fundamental aspect of poverty in Sierra Leone is food poverty. The conflict has also seriously disrupted agricultural activities countrywide resulting in the displacement of an estimated 500,000 farm families, loss of essential farm inputs and destruction of rural infrastructure, institutions and service centers. As a consequence, in 1999 only about 20% of the national requirement of 450,000 metric tons of rice was domestically produced. Livestock population and fish production (inland fisheries) have also been reduced significantly. The daily per capita supply of calories has diminished and is estimated at 2,035 Kcal compared to 2,663 for developing countries.

Available global indicators (UNDP 2000) show that the health situation in Sierra Leone is the worst in the world. Life expectancy is 38 years compared to 45 years for Sub-Saharan Africa. The low life

expectancy is due to infant and child mortality rates, about the highest in the world. The UNDP data reported infant and child mortality rates of 170 and 286 per 1000 respectively for 1998, as well as a maternal mortality rate (MMR) , the highest in the world, of 1,800 per 100,000 live births in 1999. The MICS2 Report largely attributed the exceptionally high infant and child mortality rates to the relative high prevalence of malnutrition, malaria, acute respiratory tract infections and diarrhea diseases. The dismal health situation is also attributable to inadequate health and sanitation facilities. Over 415 health units, including 15 hospitals and 150 primary health centers have been destroyed and remain non-functional in many towns and villages. Health workers have abandoned workstations in most rural communities and relocated to safe towns. The 2000 data reported that about 65%, 60% and 80% of the population are without access to safe drinking water, health services and sanitation, respectively.

### **3.4 Political outlook**

Although caution is still necessary, the peace process started on July 1999, seems to be able to end the ten years rebel war. One of the major lessons of the war and events leading up to it appear to have been learnt : the danger of allowing a large part of the economy's wealth, generated each year, to pass through Monrovia, the Liberian capital, rather than a more distant Freetown. The State stability depends strongly on the economic control of the provinces. Moreover the political leadership knows the risk of the youth frustration at the lack of social and economic prospects. Thus the priority is the economic revival, to open new job possibilities for the young generations.

However the Sierra Leonean government faces a complex situation. There is little doubt that the Freetown economy is booming. But much of the activity is based on weak foundations; namely, the purchasing power of the largest and most expensive peacekeeping operation in the world, Unamsil, with an annual budget of around US\$870m, and the 70 international humanitarian aid agencies, plus 400 local partners. In addition, the British Army has contributed more than US\$69.6m since it arrived in early May 2000. Humanitarian assistance tends to contribute to the revival of the mercantilist mentality, and do little for the establishment of market forces, in the countryside. Politically, mercantilism thrives on gift giving and patronage. The political cartels portray themselves as channeling humanitarian inputs to their clients. However to control the national economy and ensure the state stability is necessary to exit from a neo-patrimonial system towards the establishment of market forces.

The restoration of the Kabbah regime and the SLPP party was strongly supported by the US, the EU, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) . Even though the election will take place on June 2002, the SLPP is, at the moment, the only party with a clear structure and well founded. However the SLPP is subject to sharp internal divisions. Some party leader, including the president, are seeking to develop national platforms based on control of resources at the center (and especially concessions to multinational mining companies). Others have more localized power and resource bases, especially in the Mende area, in the alluvional diamond mining in the east (Kenema) and south (Bo) regions.

### **3.5 An outline of the UN intervention in Sierra Leone**

The UN intervention in Sierra Leone of the last three years is well presented in the Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal of 2000, 2001 and 2002. In each of these documents the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) for the following year is described with the related financial requests and plan budget. Moreover is presented an executive summary of the previous year with the constraints met during the CHAP implementation and the lessons learnt. The first Appeal in Sierra Leone was launched in 1997 as a Flash Appeal, following the brutal overthrow of the Kabbah Government by a military junta. Since then, the presence of UN in Sierra Leone strengthened, and after 1998, when Mr. Kabbah Government was established again, the UN agencies work in close relationship with the Government.

The UN Country Team (UNCT) is composed of nine agencies in addition to the human rights and civil affair sections of UNAMSIL, while the humanitarian community currently consists of some 46 international NGOs, over 200 national NGOs and hundreds of community based organizations. The major Government body for humanitarian affairs is the National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (NCRRR). The National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR), parastatals, civil society and thematic peace building and governance groups are also key actors in the humanitarian arena.

The strategic and short term goals of the UN intervention are:

Strategic Goal: to lay the basis for sustainable development in an integrated and complimentary manner during the transition from relief to recovery in Sierra Leone by contributing to the consolidation of peace and security, and the alleviation of poverty countrywide through: the provision of basic social services, the revival of productive activities and commerce; and the promotion of good governance and fulfillment of basic human rights.



### Short-Term Goals:

to facilitate the resettlement and community based reintegration of: internally displaced persons; returnees currently displaced in Sierra Leone; Sierra Leonean refugees upon repatriation from Guinea, Liberia and other countries; ex-combatants, child combatants and separated children, female adult abductees and camp followers.

To revive economic activities through skills development, income generation and employment, especially among women, youth and ex-combatants.

To rehabilitate and reconstruct the infrastructure of basic social services especially in the health, education, water and sanitation, agriculture and shelter sectors.

To continue the provision of relief assistance to existing vulnerable and displaced populations who are unable to return to their areas of origin due to insecurity.

To ensure the timely and integrated delivery of emergency relief assistance to potential influxes of refugees, IDPs and returnees.

To raise awareness and mitigate the spread of HIV/AIDS

The intervention sectors of the CHAP reflect the short term aim. The Table below lists each sector with the relative implementing agency, the funding requirements and the percent of the appeal that was really funded for each year. The Table shows that the sectors where most of the funds are employed are the food security and the reintegration of refugees. In the year 2000 the food emergency was one of the main humanitarian problem since the security situation was still very bad, and more than US\$ 34 m have been funded. During the 2001 the situation has improved and less than US\$17 m were used to ensure the food security. On the contrary the problem of the reintegration of refugees is still far to be solved, and the US\$ 8 m used in 2000 increases double in 2001. The deterioration of the situation in neighboring Guinea and Liberia has led to the premature repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees, who remain displaced within the country. Sierra Leone has currently 111,000 refugees in Guinea and 70,000 in Liberia, plus 247,000 internally displaced people and 100,000 returnees. To resettle and reintegrate these people is the first challenge for UN to improve the stability in the sub-region.

Table : UN consolidated inter-agency appeal for 2000, 2001 and 2002

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
Agriculture	FAO UNICEF	3,878,000 (30%)	3,387,000 (24%)	2,474,000
Child Protection	UNICEF	2,000,000 (61%)	2,430,000 (73%)	3,302,900
Coordination	OCHA WFP	1,497,290(66%)	3,989,900 (58%)	8,282,137
Education	UNICEF	1,497,290 (50%)	2,776,000 (37%)	3,196,100
Food	WFP	34,193,495 (100%)	27,612,483 (59%)	29,790,268
Health and Nutrition	UNICEF WHO	6,760,470 (30%)	7,279,521 (37%)	5,964,536
Human Rights	UNICEF UNAMSIL	1,329,125 (22%)	1,071,400 (29%)	2,572,262
Shelter	UNDP		2,900,000 (14%)	5,098,000
Security	UNDP	5,036,848 (40%)	396,090 (100%)	699,067
Water and sanitation	UNICEF	2,112,000 (42%)	2,628,000 (47%)	2,385,000
Economic Recovery	UNDP WFP	0	5,823,351 (0%)	8,702,544
HIV/AIDS	UNICEF WHO	0	1,629,800 (16%)	1,199,000
Reintegration of refugees	UNHCR	12,304,212 (65%)	16,197,657 (100%)	14,959,111
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>70,961,440 (65%)</b>	<b>78,121,202 (64%)</b>	<b>88,624,925</b>

## **4 The COOPI child protection program**

UNICEF developed a Child Protection Program in Sierra Leone to specifically address the needs of separated children: child soldiers unaccompanied children and children suffering from war-related stress. The UNICEF strategy applies the guideline defined in the Graca Machel report *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, presented in Section 1. The report stresses the central role played by the community in the reintegration of the child soldiers in the society and in the prevention of further recruitment. Thus the UNICEF strategy limits as much as possible the child institutional care. A holistic approach to the reintegration of separated children is applied to incorporate access to basic services and strength the community as a whole.

### **4.1 Research Methodology**

In this chapter is presented the child protection program implemented by COOPI in the last 3 years, starting in the summer 1999. The aim is to give a complete and systematized picture of the program, focusing on the lessons learnt on the field. Thus this chapter is the result of discussions with the expatriate program managers, the missionaries Saveriani and the COOPI national staff, in order to collect and organize all their experiences and comments. Moreover the UNICEF data about the child protection program are presented in order to give a quantitative measure of the intervention in Sierra Leone.

### **4.2 The structure of the program**

The Child Protection Program is articulated in many phases. The first regards the entering of the children into the program. Children from the fighting forces enter into the program through different channels. Since late 1999 the majority of children have entered from the demobilization centers organized by the Government agency NCDDR, but many more have either been captured and handed over to UNICEF by the security forces, were part of a negotiated release/handover or were picked up by UN military observers on patrol.

Irrespective of the way they enter the program, after screening children will be placed in an interim care program located in their area of possible reunification. Interim care of all separated children is based on the principle of family care in an environment that facilitates smooth reintegration. The aim is to help the children to re-adapt their behavior to the civil life standard. During this phase, lasting for 6 weeks, all the children benefit from services provide by the care agency, as basic

supplies, medical services, trauma counseling, education and skills training opportunities and recreation.

While children are in the interim care centers, all the necessary information to trace their family are collected. Social-workers trace the families and sensitize them to accept back their children . The phase of family mediation can be long and difficult since the atrocities committed by the fighting forces increase the likelihood of opposition by the communities and rejection by the families of the return of child soldiers. Thus sensitization and advocacy at the community level are implemented to re-establish the link between these children, their families and the community.

If a child can not be reunified from the interim care center he/she should be placed in an alternative care program. When the children are younger than 14 years they are generally placed in a foster family. Foster parents receive training on how to look after these children and how to identify and refer children with behavioral problems. The older children are placed in group home, small communities under the responsibility of a caregiver, or in an independent living program, where the children live alone. The older children in the group home or independent living are also inside the Economic Training Unit (ETU) project, that enrolls them in a skill training centers where they can learn a job in a time scale of around one or two years.

After the reunification, counselors and social workers monitor the reintegration process of children for one year. During this period the child protection program is also responsible for the enrollment of children in school. The program has developed a strong relationship with the school system, through the Community Education Investment Project (CEIP). This project give a packet of schooling materials for each child ex-combatants enrolled in the school. Moreover training for teachers in dealing with difficult children are organized.

Finally health care psychological counseling are provided during all the phases of the program.

### **4.3 Interim care centers**

Even though the UNICEF strategy tries to limit the children institutionalization , transit structures are necessary. Entry of separated children, with special reference to those from the fighting forces, into interim care center is the first step towards the social reintegration of these children. Interim care is based on the principle of family care to prepare children to the reintegration. In the centers children attend to a non formal school and psychosocial activities.

The emergency centers established in previous years were strengthened to care for up to 2000 children in anticipation of an influx of children following the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement in July 1999. The centers are *transit center*, where children should not stay longer than 2 months, the time necessary to trace the family, or *interim care center*, where the children can stay for a longer period when the family tracing process is particularly difficult. In the Western area COOPI and FHM manage 4 centers for separated children. COOPI has two transit centers, YMCA in Lakka and the New Transit Center in Calaba Town. Moreover COOPI established a center Conforti for the adolescent mothers. FHM manages an interim care center St Michael in Lakka, that can host up to 500 children.

#### **4.3.1 The center structure**

The center structure, adjusted across the duration of the program, is now a model for all the NGOs working in the child protection area. The structure is based on three teams: the social team, the logistic team and the medical team. The social team is constituted by the center supervisor, responsible for the center finance and for the monitoring of the different teams, the social worker, responsible of the children documentation, the caregivers that live for three days a week in the center with the children and play the role of foster parents, and finally the teachers responsible for the non formal school. In the logistic team, led by the logistician, responsible of the center store, there are the cooks, the security staff and the drivers. The medical team is composed by a doctor and a nurse. While the nurse is daily in the center and provides for the basic medical assistance, the doctor visits the center on a weekly basis. A well defined structure, with a clear role definition is essential for an efficient center management, and for the formation of the national staff.

The center is the first step to the child reintegration, thus all the programs that will follow the child after his reintegration should start inside the center. The social worker responsible for the monitoring of the reintegration process begins the relationship with the child in the center, in order to build the trust necessary for an efficient follow up. Also the ETU project starts inside the centers forming the older children on the management of economic activities. The center should be in close relationship with all the other teams of the child protection program

### **4.3.2 The activities**

The daily life of the children in the center is organized in a series of activities aimed to support the children in their reintegration process in the society. The activities are divided in: activities to readjust the children to the typical family life in Sierra Leone, a non formal school, recreational activities and psychosocial activities. The first set are activities related to the care of the environment, of the personal objects and of the own person. In the family daily routine children are required to perform certain household chores, to help with cleaning and cooking and with the washing of their clothes. Older girls are expected to help with the care of younger children. Thus in the center daily life there are activities aimed to improve the community life. For older boys who have been in positions of command in the bush, the readjustment to a family way of life, with its responsibilities, is especially difficult, and can require intensive perseverance from caregivers.

All children attend school from 8am to Midday. Children are grouped according to attainment level with a maximum of ten per group. A program developed by Norwegian Refugee Council is used to prepare younger children for re-entry into the formal school system at appropriate level. Each child is assessed for level of attainment and questioned about his school history. A set of learning objectives is then established to prepare the child to re-enter the school system a year above the point where s/he left it. Considerable emphasis is placed on rebuilding children's confidence in their capacity to learn and rejoin a school community. For this reason the school environment is kept as close as possible to that within the formal school system. Older children who do not wish to enter the formal school system follow a program of non-formal literacy and numeracy.

The recreational activities keep the children busy all the day. Sporting activities and visit to local workshops provide important opportunities for children to have contact with the local community, and build confidence in the possibility of reintegration. Football matches are regularly played with children from local schools or other institutions.

The psychosocial activities support the children in the difficult process of re-adjustment to the civil life. A series of activities are developed to help children confront anxieties frequently experienced after demobilization, and to raise awareness to the dangers of behaviors that can create hostility from others. These activities are suitable for use with small groups of children, and are based on story telling, role-play, drawing, or discussion. These activities help to bring important issues into the open as the fears of reprisals, fear of being rejected by the family, fear that parents are dead, etc.. The children that had been in interim care center for some time, have overcome their anxieties about being reunified, and suffer of frustration that the reunification seems endlessly delayed. The

focus of group work for these children is changed to focus on medium term planning of education and career, and helping children to begin implementing plans while still in interim care. It is very important to develop tools to monitor the psychological status of the children that stay longer in the center and to evaluate different approaches to giving the children better support.

The group work are complemented by counseling with individual children. In this way the psychosocial worker try to build up a relationship of trust and enable the child to confide, so preparing the ground for a more productive therapeutic relationship.

### **4.3.3 Discussion and lesson learnt**

The UNICEF national report of the emergency care shows that the ICC intervention has been effective: the 13 ICC in Sierra Leone has provided care for 2400 ex-combatants and 1400 separated children during the year 2001. The 66% of these children have been reintegrated in the society, the 46% has been reunified with their family, while the remaining 20% has been placed in an alternative care program. Only the 3% run away. Finally the centers has provided an educational program formal or non formal in the center to more than 80% to the children.

The constraints identified by UNICEF at the end of the 2001 are the following:

1. Only 320 girls have been in the centers, and less than 10% of them were ex-combatants. Thus there is a selective mechanism that keeps girls within the fighting forces. The child protection procedures can not solve this problem, related to the demobilization process. The rebels do not demobilize the girls because they are considered as their wife and property. The girls see in the rebels the only possibility of protection and they accept the situation as it is.
2. Only 49% of the children has spent in the center a period less than 6 weeks. Often the problem related to the family tracing or to the child health care require a longer stay of the children in the center. Thus is important to evaluate if the 6 weeks period is too short or the family tracing mechanism could be more efficient.
3. Children often face difficulties in living the center and try to come back after reunification, since the center quality of life is generally much better than the average family life.

The most important lesson learnt by COOPI about the center structure are the following:

1. A detailed documentation , in order to define the identity of the separated children and, in the same time, to collect data regards the children situation in Sierra Leone.
2. The lifestyle in the center should be close to the daily life of children in Sierra Leone, once a minimum standard has been provided. This choice is done to avoid conflicts with the local

population, that could be jealous of the ex-combatant lifestyle, and to avoid that children get used to a life standard too high with respect to the one they will face in the community.

3. The ratio between the number of caregivers and children should not be too low, not lower than 1:10. In this way the caregivers are able to establish a close relationship with the children and to gain their trust. The children often hide their real identity, their age and name, the region where they come from, since they are scared to be recognized and accused for the actions done with the fighting forces. Only inside a relationship of trust with the caregivers, the children start to talk about themselves, their families and their past. Moreover the ex-combatant children have experienced a break in their relation with the adults, given the violence they have suffered from the rebels and also the violence they have inflicted to the adults of their community or family. Thus the relation with the caregivers is very important to reconstruct the intergeneration relationship of the ex-child soldier with the adults.
4. The children inside the center should be always kept busy with educational, recreational and psychosocial activities.

The ICC strategy should be adapted constantly with the evolution of the situation in the different regions of Sierra Leone. Most of the ex-combatant children have been reunified in the Western Area during the year 2001, thus the number of ICC can be reduced. However in the Western Area the phenomenon of street children is increasing, and requires centers with a new kind of strategy, focus on the problems of the street children. In the North and East regions, where the presence of the rebels is stronger, and the reunification process of the ex-combatant children is more difficult for security reasons, the emergency phase lasts longer than in the Western Area, and the transit centers are still an essential instrument for the child soldiers reunification.

#### **4.4 Sensitization activities**

The success of the child protection program depends on the community active participation. The UNICEF strategy stresses the leading role of the community in the reintegration of any child in their social environment. This aspect demands a strong relationship between the program implementing agencies and the local community. The traditional social care system will be activated to support the acceptance and normalization process using traditional activities. The population should know the child protection program, share the objectives, and be aware of the responsibility towards the new generations.



The ten years of war, the atrocities against civilians and the massive displacement of population have strongly affected the Sierra Leonean social structure. Especially the January 6 attack to Freetown in 1999, with its absurd violence, affected the population. People in Freetown refers to the 1999 events as a fratricidal war, which many have used for personal revenges or to take possession of others property. The children played the role of torturer, and women suffered horrible violence. The community need to revise these events, to contextualize them , and to find ideas and reference points to re-start.. For this reason the community sensitization is an essential sector of the child protection program. The sensitization should support the local community in dealing with its trauma and in the redefinition of its role toward the children care and education.

#### **4.4.1 The issues**

The sensitization programs focus on the following issues:

1. The child soldiers have been forced to fight, have been abducted, threatened, and drugged by the rebels. In this view it is understandable how the children from victims became persecutors.
2. The girls raped by the fighting forces are not responsible for what happened and the community should relate to them as to war victims. The community should help them in the reintegration process and accept the children born from these violence.
3. The community is responsible for the children reintegration. The community should plan their future, educating them and avoiding any kind of discrimination. What is essential is to respond not to the needs of the children from an outsider's point of view, but the needs of the children from the point of view of the family and community, and of the children themselves. Any response to the real needs of the children can be better articulated and conceptualized by the local communities, since they know what can work or not work given their past, present and future situations. Finally the programs for child soldiers can make only a limited, short term contribution to the welfare and well-being of child soldiers. It is their families and communities who remain the primary agents in the development of the children.
4. If the community fails in the reintegration process the children will become street children and the probability they will be recruited again by the fighting forces is very high. Thus the peace process in Sierra Leone is strongly connected to the community ability to reintegrate the ex-combatant children.

5. It is necessary to re-think to the war events, to the role played by different agents, to the responsibilities of the government, of the local community and personal ones. It is important that local community plans the peace process.

In the first moment, after the Freetown attack, the priority was to sensitize the community to re-accept back the ex-combatants children, to recognize them as children and overcome the fear towards them. In a second moment, one year later, the most relevant issue of the sensitization program is how the children reintegration can be sustainable in the extreme poverty situation of Sierra Leone. The access to basic services as school, health and social care becomes the most important problem the community has to face.

#### **4.4.2 The media used**

The instruments used by COOPI in the last two years for the sensitization program are:

1. a program of sensitization workshops and community meetings. The workshops addressed to those groups who plays key roles in the children reintegration process, as women associations, elders committees, religious communities, teachers of schools in a given area, development committees, etc. The purpose of community meetings is also to explore the possibilities for the development of local child-protection committees, that mediate between the international NGOs and the local population.
2. a program of performances acted by local drama groups in the street of Freetown and in the villages where most of the children have been reunified. These shows, through dances and plays, are very incisive to sensitize the population in general.
3. a radio program in which experts of child protection, government and NGOs representatives discuss about the issues of the children reintegration. The program provides opportunities for live phone-in. The radio also provides a mass tracing service, since the reading of the names of the demobilized children allows the families everywhere in Sierra Leone to trace their children.
4. the organization of special events as concerts and football match. COOPI has organized a large scale sensitization rally in the Siaka Stevens stadium in February 2000. This was an appeal both to those in power and to man in the street to facilitate the return of separated children to their families. These special events focus on the necessity of a national reconciliation.

#### **4.4.3 Discussion and lesson learnt**

The choice of the media is relevant for the effectiveness of the sensitization program. The media should be easily accessible and familiar to people, and they should use images and symbols of the local culture. The sensitization program has been a success, mostly due to the fact that COOPI has based its activities on local traditions, referring to local association and using traditional rituals. An example is the forgiveness rite: a ceremony to clean away the faults of a community member, that after the rite becomes a new person and nobody can remember his or her past. Through this rite many children have been reintegrated in the community of origin.

In most communities in Freetown the expected hostility did not seem to arise. It became apparent that reintegration of children was not longer a concept that needed explaining and justifying to people, rather it was something that they needed help to achieve. The number of children abducted by the rebels during the Freetown attack was so high that most of the families were affected. Many have seen one of their children or a child of relatives or friends abducted by the rebels. People used to say they do not discriminate ex-child soldiers because one of them could be their son or daughter. However the social situation in Freetown is complex and the traditional safety nets are released, the poverty is deep and the access to education and jobs is limited. Thus the main problem of the community after two years from the Freetown attack is no more to overcome the hate towards the ex-child combatants, but to find the social and economic resources to effectively reintegrate them in the society. Progressively therefore the purpose of the sensitization program became that of encouraging key players within communities to initiate activities that would support the families of the reintegrated children.

#### **4.5 Family tracing**

The aim of the family tracing is to reunify the child with his/her family. In the Western Area, FHM and ADRA are the agencies responsible for the family tracing. The first step is to obtain the information about the family from the child. When the children arrive to the centers usually do not say their real identities. Only after some time, when they have built up a relationship of trust with the caregivers or the social workers they tell their past. Some children know the family address but others remember only the area, thus the social workers walk around with them until they recognize the street or the house (acting tracing). Sometimes the radio or other mass media are used. Often the family has moved and it takes time to find the new location.

After the family is traced, the mediation between the family and the child starts. Socialworkers test the willingness of the family to receive the child. At the beginning the families were scared to accept their children, but after the situation stabilized the fear of the families decreases, and generally they are ready to take back the child. The huge sensitization work done in the last years has been essential to prepare the families to the reunification.

In the same time the socialworkers prepare the child to the reunification. Since the first moment a child enters in a center s/he should know that the center is only a temporary care, preparing him/her to the reintegration in the society. Children must be kept informed at each step about plans been made for them. The biggest problem in the reunification process is that children often prefer to stay in the center than to live with a generally very poor family. Thus the work of family tracing should be well coordinated with the centers, since the sensitization of the children before the reunification is essential for a successful reintegration.

The FHM data in November 2001, show that the 52% of the 2.525 children arrived in the COOPI and FHM centers since 1999 have been reunified with their family, the 35% have been transferred in an other region where the family should be, the 10% have been placed in Alternative Care Program and only the 1% run away. Thus the family can be traced in most of the cases, between 52% and 87%, if we assume that all the transferred children will be reunified in the area of origin.

#### **4.6 Alternative Care**

When children have been in the ICC for more than 6 weeks and it is clear that they can not be reunified with their families because they can not be located or the security situation will not allow it, a decision is made about alternative care. The alternative care program is implemented to ensure that children spend the least amount of time in an institutional setting. The program consist of foster care, care in group home, placement in an independent living situation, or an apprenticeship. Age is the main criteria used to place children either in foster homes (under 14 years) or in the other possibilities (over 15 years). Placement in Group homes or apprenticeship depends on the educational background. Those who want to attend school and demonstrate ability tend to be placed in Group Homes, small communities of 5/6 boys that under the responsibility of a caregiver attend secondary school. Those with little or no education are encouraged into apprenticeships and skills training to provide children with meaningful occupation and a means of earning a living in the near

future. Independent living is a transitional arrangement to move those around 18 years of age out into the community.

Generally the choice of the alternative care is difficult, especially for girls, and adolescent mothers. Generally girls are not educated and for this reason are placed in skill training centers to learn a job. However placing children according to educational background rather than ability could have the effect of perpetuating discrimination and fail to begin to address one of the underlying causes of conflict.

#### **4.6.1 Fostering**

Foster care appears to be the best alternative care option mainly because it fits closely with cultural norms and practices. However it can be difficult to foster older children. These youths often have behavioral problems – they can be violent and argumentative and people are frightened of physical and verbal confrontation. There is also concern at the way in which participation in rape might affect current behavior of some young men. There are other difficulties placing young women, because of the possibility of sexual coercion by the men of the family.

The process for fostering children starts with the family identification. Potential foster parents are identified through church, mosque, Foster Parents Associations and other community networks. The main problem is to evaluate if the fostering is done because of a desire to care for children and to contribute to community well-being or for profit. Once identified, potential foster parents are assessed in terms of mental and physical health, family size, sex and age of children, economic status and living circumstances, and standing in the community. The community also needs to be assessed in terms of opportunities for education and skill training. In this evaluation process it is relevant the active support of the community elders and chives. COOPI runs workshops for potential foster parents and invite existing foster parents to participate. The purpose is to inform potential parents about program policies and to give them the opportunity to hear from those already involved. They are told of the nature and extent of support they can expect from the agency, what they are expected to provide for the child (make sure the child goes to school or skills training, get adequate care and nourishment, etc) , and the sort of problems they might encounter with children and how to deal with them. COOPI and FHM emphasize that the placement is temporary, that the child is not being adopted. Family tracing is ongoing and children may be reunited at any time. Once a foster family is identified then a child is found who will fit within the family in terms of age and sex. The child is introduced to the parents and goes for a short stay. The length of stay

varies from a few days to a few weeks. The child is visited frequently during this time and at the end of the period the child is taken back to the ICC to check if they are comfortable in the home.

COOPI and FHM have a clear support policy for foster families. They provide foster parents with 20.000 leones (US\$10) per month per child for basic necessities such as food and clothing and to cover the cost of the basic health care. In addition they meet medical expenses for more serious health problems and provide for the children's schooling or skills training. After what is essentially a 3-month trial period the foster parents are entitled to Income Generating Assistance (IGA) of 300.000 leones (US\$ 150) per child, in order to meet all the child's expenses.

The most common problems, ending in the child run away, are economics problems. The family can overestimate the COOPI support or family's circumstances might have changed following the initial assessment for fostering. It could be because of ill health or loss of income, which may be temporary. Thus the solution of this kind of problem is based on establish a good relationship with the family: the agency should clearly communicate the level of support and in the same time the agency should help the family during temporary economics crisis in order to protect the child.

#### **4.6.2 Group Homes**

The group homes GH are the alternative care appropriate for older children at secondary school who need time and space to study. Once a group has formed, accommodation is located, the caregivers are identified. The preference is given to a couple with up to two children. The couple is assessed in terms of education, economic circumstances, standing in the community, the number and age of their children and so forth. At least one of the couple should be employed and teachers are seen as ideal candidates. The agency support consists in a rent-free house and supplies for the caregivers.

The majority of children in Group Homes appear well off, at least in terms of resources. Agency support for the program ensures that children are well fed and housed, and are able to attend school or skill training as well as participate in other community activities. However provision of resources alone does not ensure make up for a lack of care or attention. The children are placed in Group Homes because they are too hold to foster or difficult to handle or both. Thus these children are the more problematic and need extra attention and psychological support. The difficulties in managing the GH children has many repercussion, one of which is staff turnover. When this happen children are disrupted, resources are used finding replacements and retraining, and children take time to

settle again. Agency staff need to be sure that GH parents clearly understand what is required of them as well as what to expect in terms of program support to minimize turnover.

The caregivers training should be improved since the psychosocial care in GH is still insufficient.

An other problem is related to the cost of GH. People feel that GH are getting more than their share of resources at the expense of foster children. Moreover the standard of living in GH is above the one in the community and this may cause resentment. Thus is necessary to avoid the concentration of resources in GH and elaborate community based programs. On the other side the agency staff have to work hard to sensitize people about the needs of separated children. Finally COOPI and FHM are concerned at the sustainability of the GH program: how the caregivers can become economically self-sufficient in taking care of these children. A possibility is to provide IGA to GH parents, and once they accept it they will be responsible for meeting the children's expenses from business profit. However the GH cost is high, and it is difficult that the GH parents be able to implement a business with the required profit.

#### **4.6.3 Apprenticeships**

The apprenticeship is a skill training program. Traditionally apprentices live with the trainer, thus this kind of alternative care tends to be for older children and for youths rather than young women. FHM and COOPI stipulate a contract with the trainer for one year. The contract fixes the fee for training (usually 500.000 leones per trainee) and the trainer will feed and care for the general welfare of the child.

Many children have been placed in apprenticeship where they have become part of the community and are benefiting from being meaningfully occupied. Within a few years many will be employable or able to begin their own businesses, given access to funding. Generally trainers are proud of the children, and say that they work seriously and do not give any behavioral problems. They also mentioned the shortage of tools and the need for them if the children are to learn.

The most important problem is the lack of training standards, and of a well defined learning program, necessary for monitoring the children progresses. Moreover the COOPI and FHM support last only for one year, while the apprenticeship often takes more time to be done.

#### **4.6.4 Independent living**

Independent living is a strategy for getting older children back out and into the community. Many have been too independent for too long for them to be able to fit easily with their own or any other family and they claim that they do not want to be reunified. Initially FHM designed the IL program to cater for a specific group of children who arrived at the ICC in 1996/1997 and became institutionalized but it soon became clear that others needed the program also. Thus FHM and COOPI have started to give the opportunity to some of the older children to live alone.

Youths enter the program in one or two ways –either they demonstrate that they are mature enough to manage their own affairs and indicate that they want to live independently, or they have been so disruptive in their GH that they are encouraged to live independently. Young women generally are not offered this option, even if COOPI has around 10 adolescent mothers in independent living program. Initially children were placed in pairs but this often lead to trouble and FHM and COOPI now prefer to place young people alone.

The agencies provide rented accommodation for up to a year and the basic necessities – rice, soap, clothing and so forth – for a three month setting in period. After 3 month the child is eligible for IGA of 400.000 leones, to start an economics activity. Before the child moves out to live alone, they attend a workshop on how to manage and run a small business. They discuss with the Coordinator of the Economic Unit what sort of business they want to do and the Coordinator and child work together to set it up. A bank account is opened and agreement reached about how much the child will save each day or week. Once settled and having attended a workshop, the child uses the IGA to establish a small business and is expected to maintain himself from the profit. However many young people who have been on the program for a while and try to live from their business profit are finding things difficult. Several talk in terms of how much IGA they left rather than how much profit they make. Monitoring young people who have received IGA is likely to be hard and time consuming and raise questions about what happens when funds run out.

Children in IL program seems alone and the COOPI staff say that they need more psychological support.

#### **4.6.5 Discussion and lesson learnt**

The UNICEF data shows that the alternative Care program in Sierra Leone has provided care to more than 1000 children during 2001. Around 90% of these children are male. The 54% of children in ACP are placed in foster families, the 12% in apprenticeship, the 30% in Group Homes and only



the 4% in Independent Living program, all in the Western Area. The following histograms (Fig 1 and Fig 2) show the children distribution among the different kind of ACP, depending on sex and child category: separated or demobilized. The plots refer to the national situation and to the Western Area situation respectively. In the Western Area the distribution is completely different from the national one: while in the provinces the fostering is much more common than the other ACP, in the Western area the GH and IL programs become more important.

Thus many children and young people have benefited from alternative care and will continue to do it in the future. Many children are placed in a web of social relationship where they are able to establish connections with families and others, and participate in normal activities of school, further training, household chores and so forth. The temporary nature of the care does not seem to concern the children: most seem happy to have the chance to begin living a more normal life. From the COOPI and FHM experience it is possible to conclude:

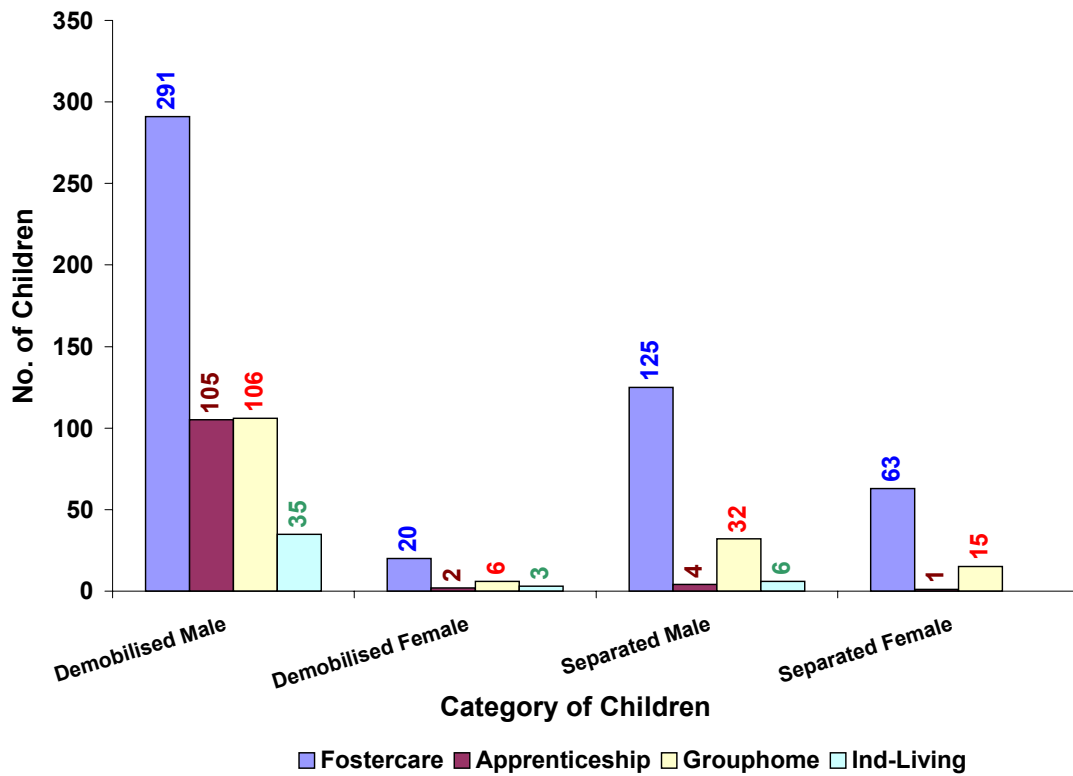
Foster care appears to be the best alternative care option because it fits with local culture. Traditionally children are moved between families for a variety of reasons where they become attached to and part of that extended family and community. As such their care, and more important their discipline, is shared. Such attachment does not mean family ties cease, but that the child's and family's networks are expanded and strengthened. Fostering is also preferable in that it is relatively cheap and so sustainable, even if requires a big monitoring work.

Also the apprenticeship provides the reintegration of children in the society, but it is possible only for male.

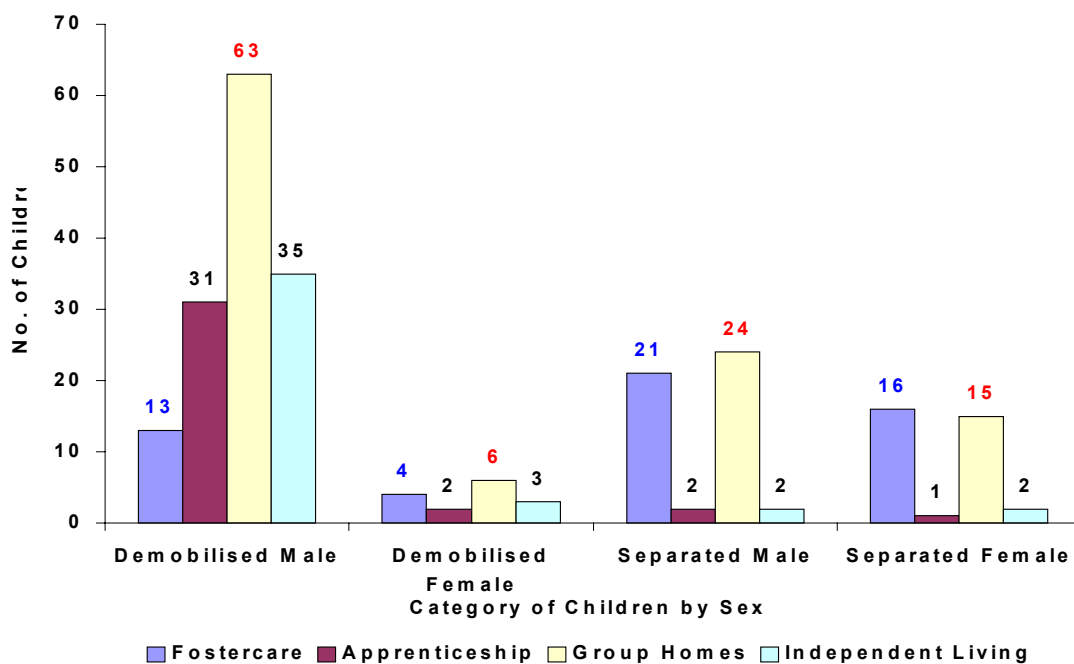
The Group Homes and Independent Living are both resource intensive and fit less well with the cultural context. Moreover one of the major concern is the program sustainability. However GH and IL remain the only possibilities for older children that do not find a place in an apprenticeship program.

The choice of the ACP is delicate and depends not only on the child characteristics but also on the characteristics of community where he/she will be placed. In a rural community, with a clear social structure, where the elders and the chief have a strong authority, the fostering care is the best option. In an urban environment the society is totally different, it is more complex and articulated. After the war, with the massive arrival of displace people in Freetown, the city social structure is changing. During this transitional phase the traditional social networks are released. Since it is difficult to find well organized community, with chives able to identify and support foster parents in Freetown the Group Homes and Independent living become the most plausible options of ACP (see fig).

**Figure 1** the national distribution of separated and demobilized children in different kind of ACP



**Figure 2** The Western Area distribution of separated and demobilized children in different kind of ACP.



The Income Generation Assistance (IGA) is a loan given to the foster families or to the youths in the IL program in order to make them able to become economically self-sufficient. However most of them was not able to establish a business that will return the required profit. This might be because the IGA provided is obviously too small to develop a sustainable business, or it might be that the person concerned is not good at business or both. Whatever the reason, the risk to the agency is high both in terms of child protection and financial loss. At this point is necessary to ask what business the agency is in : small business investment or child protection. It is possible to accommodate the conflicting objectives of promoting small business development and child protection by separating the former and promoting it through existing community development agencies. However unless the two are clearly separated one can still impact negatively on the other. People who have received IGA have not turned up to Foster Parent Association meetings because of concerns about needing to report on IGA. If agencies are to continue with IGA it is recommended that the activity be clearly separated from provision of alternative care.

The monitoring remains the weakest part of the program since minimum standard has not been agreed. Staff also needs simple monitoring tools and training in monitoring and evaluation if they are to monitor successfully and provide information for program improvements.

## **4.7 Follow up**

### **4.7.1 Objectives**

In Garca Marchel's report, the child protection program is proposed as a tool to strengthen the local understanding of the general child care issue. For this reason the follow-up phase, beginning soon after reunification, is the most delicate and crucial one of the whole program, since it takes place within the local community. The main goal is to facilitate the child reintegration, through a careful monitoring and possible support to the host family and local community. Monitoring is strictly related to psycho-social team's work. The psycho-social action is focused on conflict management in the host family, sensitization activities on the local community and enforcement of the institutions. It is worth to notice, though, that both actions are deeply correlated, and often the social-workers employed in the monitoring are also engaged in conflict resolution and have to maintain relationship with the institutions.

### **4.7.2 Methodology**

The follow-up strategy carried on by COOPI in the last years, is complex and articulated and involves the work of several teams. After reunification, FHM sends a record with children names and addresses to COOPI reintegration team. Each social-worker of the team is responsible for a given area and has to monitor all the children that have been reintegrated in that area, by means of weekly visits. During the visit, the social-worker controls child health status, his relation with the family and the neighbors, if he is causing problems to the community or he is excluded from it. Moreover the social-worker also visits the school the child is supposed to attend, and controls his participation to classes. The information is collected by means of informal interviews with the child and the family or with the teachers. A standard survey is used as a guideline during the interviews.

During the first visits the social-worker gather all the information about the family, the number of components, their age, sex, health and occupation status. After about one month, the child is asked to choose between school and a skill training course. Generally the choice is based upon the age. Children below twelve are enrolled in school, while elder attend professional training courses. Only a few choose to attend secondary schools. At the moment of the enrollment, it is stated clearly that the program will only pay the school fee for the first year; subsequent years are on charge of the family. This limitation can sometimes make the family decide for the one year skill training course. In the case when the child is enrolled in school, his name is forwarded to the educational team, responsible for the UNICEF Community Educational Investment Program (CEIP). Otherwise the name is passed to the Economic Training Unit (ETU) that enrolls the child in one of the skill training centers of the NCDDR program, financed by the government. These programs will be treated in more detail in the following sections.

The problems detected by the social-workers are reported to the various teams. The psycho-social workers are involved in case of problems related to the relationship in the family. Health related problems are treated by the Holy Mary Clinic, that within an agreement with COOPI, provides free medical support for the duration of the follow-up phase. Finally, the reintegration team is in contact with the educational team for what concerns the school and with ETU for the professional training. All this requires a fluid and effective network of communications between the reintegration team and all the other program components.

During the first year of COOPI intervention, it was decided to economically support directly the host families. This money was meant to be a starting point for an economical activity of the family, in order to it be able to support the child after the first year. The results of this approach have not been satisfying. Families generally spent all the money after a short time, without creating any

sustainable economical activity. Moreover, this economical exchange – child against money – was subject to misunderstanding and often the cause for the degradations of relationships within the family. For these reasons now the strategy adopted is to invest the same money in increasing the living conditions of the whole community. This kind of support is also more coherent with the general goal of enforcing the communities and the existing social networks.

#### **4.7.3 Relationship with schools**

As Graca Machel reports the child soldiers reintegration depends strongly on the possibility for the child to be enrolled in school. However as discussed in the previous chapter the school situation in Sierra Leone is very poor, leading to many difficulties in the reunified children enrollment. Schools are over-crowded, and the teachers often refuse children since they do not have the possibility to take care of them. The schools lack of space, chairs, benches, and books. Moreover the teachers are under-paid, with little education, and little motivation in doing a job completely neglected by the government. Often they do not have any psychosocial formation and lack of the skills necessary to deal with difficult children. For all these reasons, at the beginning of the COOPI program, schools did not want to enroll ex combatant children.

In order to smooth these problems UNICEF has developed the Community Education Investment Project (CEIP). For each ex-combatant enrolled, the school receives a package of materials, addressed to all the children attending that school. There are three different kind of packages, depending on the school needs : a learning package, containing notebooks, pencils etc; a teaching package, containing books, blackboard etc; and a recreational package. UNICEF reports that 880 ex-combatant children have benefit for this program , in 106 different schools, with more than 78.000 student and more than 2.000 teachers. In the western area 22 schools have benefit from CEIP during 2001. This kind of support is defined to induce the schools to accept child soldiers avoiding any form of discrimination. All the students benefit of the UNICEF support, not only the child soldiers. Helping only the reunified children makes them different from the other students, and this could lead to jealousies dangerous for the children integration.

However the CEIP program is only one of the many instruments used by COOPI to establish a good relationship with the schools. Generally COOPI organizes a series of activities with both students and teachers. Psychosocial workers developed classroom activities to promote reconciliation, de-escalation of conflict, tolerance, and confidence in the possibility of peace. Teachers in the same schools attend workshops to raise awareness of the importance of these activities, and to learn the basic techniques.

#### **4.7.4 Discussion and lesson learnt**

COOPI is the only agency that was able to carry on a complete follow-up program. It was partially facilitated by the fact that in the western area communications are much better than in other zones of the country. For this reasons COOPI experience in this field deserves great attention. Although a complete analysis is made difficult by the program being still active, and its long term effects still to come, it is nevertheless possible to draw some qualitative conclusions.

According to the program manager responsible for the reintegration team, and the social-workers, the main problems encountered can be resumed in the following:

1. Communications among the different teams involved in the follow-up are often too slow grant the program efficiency. The time interleaved between the problem notification by the reintegration team and the psycho or health intervention is a crucial parameter for the program success. Also the waiting time for the school enrollment should be as short as possible. But often the period between reunification and enrollment in school or in a skill training center, lasts for months. This is mainly due to the slow procedure involving the reintegration team, the educational team, UNICEF, ETU and NCDDR. Long waiting can turn out to be dangerous for the family reintegration of ex-combatant children .
2. Social-workers relationship with the host families is often difficult. Economical conditions are often inadequate even for the basic needs and the social-workers are therefore under the constant pressure of support requests. Although the economical help provided by COOPI is stated clearly from the very beginning of the reintegration, for the social-workers it is difficult to always deny the help requested and sometimes they prefer not to visit certain families at all. It could be useful to define a minimum standard below which COOPI is able to support at least partially the family and at the same time train the social-worker to be able to decide which families can benefit of such help.
3. The duration of the follow-up program is not well defined. It was estimated as one year, considering the time required for a family to escape from the poverty induced by the war. But children that have been reintegrated by COOPI since more than one year, often leave school because the family is not able to pay the fees. In this sense the program is not sustainable.

The major successes are:

1. The percentage of children whose reintegration failed or that have escaped from the families, is extremely low. There are no precise data yet, but according to the social-workers all the reintegrated children remain in their families.
2. Most of the children is well accepted by the community and shows no problems in the relationships with the local population. Thanks to the counseling work of the social and psycho-social workers, tensions and conflicts are resolved without affecting the child and the community.
3. Children integration in schools and in skill training is satisfactory. Children never cause particular problems to the teachers and generally achieve good results.
4. Social-workers were able to establish a relationship of trust with the local associations and the elder and chives of the village.

Since the part of the analysis of the reintegration program is of crucial importance both for the child protection program evaluation and for the proposal of future intervention this study will be treated in more detail in the next sections.

## **4.8 Economic Training Unit**

As discussed in the previous sections regard the alternative care program, the most serious problem of the child protection is to ensure the economic sustainability of the child reintegration. In order to make separated adolescents self sufficient, NCDDR funds COOPI to implement a skill training program in Freetown.

### **4.8.1 The methodology**

The economic training unit of COOPI assesses the potential and willingness of small enterprises to provide training to young ex-combatants and to support their integration into the economy. The enterprises chosen for the program, called skill training centers, benefit of a supply of tools and materials necessary for the training activities.

Much of the training support has been given when members of the ETU have visited the enterprises to monitor the progress of the children. On these occasions members of the team would discuss the timetable and program of training, as well as pedagogical methods employed. In addition workshops are organized for managers of the collaborating enterprises on effective ways of monitoring the progress of trainees, on special problems in providing training for ex-combatants, in

particular on ways of dealing with discipline problems , poor attendance, and difficult of integrating with other employees or trainees, and finally on the basic of small business management Thus the enterprises see in the ETU program and in offering training to ex-combatants not only an economical resource, but also a possibility to learn and improve their business management.

The children in the program attend also a series of classes on pricing, costing, record keeping, marketing skills, stock keeping, business planning, and basic education. Once the skill training program is successfully achieved, the children plan their business with the ETU support. An IGA of 300.000 leones plus the necessary tools are provided to start their economic activity. The ETU monitors the children for 3 months. A social worker meets the child on weekly based to help him in the planning of his business, selecting markets places, managing of stocks, etc.

#### **4.8.2 Discussion**

The results of the ETU project are complex to evaluate. From a social point of view the skill training centers has a strong impact on ex-combatant children reintegration. The children spend all the day inside the enterprise, wearing an uniform, busied in a group work. They feel to belong to a group, that is recognized and appreciated by all the society, and this feeling help them in redefining their own identity. The children learn to manage the effort and the responsibility of a job, and the relationship with the others in the civilian life. The hierarchical relationship with the enterprise master is very strong and helps the ex-combatants children to build a relationship of trust and respect with adults. The master becomes a point of reference in solving any kind of problems, the authority and the judge of any conflicts. Finally the skill training are an aggregation point for the local people, that stop there to discuss news and to spend time. In these enterprises the ex-combatant children have the opportunity to socialize with people and to erase the prejudices about them.

From an economical point of view the results are much less satisfactory. The skill training course lasts only 6 month, a too short period to effectively learn a job. Moreover the job opportunity in Freetown is small, for the overpopulation due to the war. The only possibility for the ex-combatants children is to work as mechanic, tailor, hair dressing, soap making and carpentry. After the skill training the adolescents are not able to start a new enterprise and it is very difficult to find employee job. Thus the ETU project is not sustainable from the economical point of view.

However in a post-emergency phase is very important to strength the social infrastructure, necessary base for a future development. In Sierra Leone the skill training centers are one of the most important traditional forms to educate the young generations. Now they are supported by the



international and governmental funds, and they depends completely on these funds. The skill training centers can not be a sustainable reality until the Sierra Leone economy re-starts. However the economic growth requires time: first the disarmament process has to end, than the elections have to establish a formal government, only at that moment the government elected can define a growth plan with WB and IMF. In the mean time the NGOs should support the skill training, in order to support the developing of social networks that are able to include the ex-combatant children. This is a necessary condition to avoid other crises and to prepare the society to the economic growth.

## **4.9 Health care**

The treatment and training of child soldiers involves a high degree of risk for their physical well-being, especially for the youngest amongst them. Their bodies are still developing and they are thus at greater risk of injury and disability from the privations that are common in military life. These include poor diet, bad sanitary conditions and inadequate health care, and the rigors of harsh training routines and excessive punishments that can leave them weakened and debilitated. There are numerous instances of the routine administration of drugs and alcohol, particularly before a battle. Sexual abuse of both boys and girls entailing for many the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and pregnancy for the girls.

The health care is a transversal service in the child protection program, starting at the moment the child arrive in the ICC and continues after the child reunification during all the follow up period.

### **4.9.1 Medical Services**

Given the children bad health conditions, the ICC have developed a system of health care very efficient. All children arriving to the centers are immediately screened by a doctor, they are tested on malaria, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases STD. Inside each structure there is a clinic able to grant basic health services, where a nurse is in residence to provide day-to-day care. The doctor monitors standards of medical care during weekly visits, receives health reports, examines the children, eventually prescribes clinical investigations and treatments. COOPI stresses that the constant presence of the doctor in the center is not necessary and risks to hospitalize the child soldiers. The role of the nurse is crucial, thus the ICC nurses have been carefully selected among the ones recognized by the national health system and they have been formed on community health, focus on hygiene education and prevention. In the Conforti Welcome Home at Calaba Town, which host pregnant girls and suckling teenage mothers released by the fighting forces – a trained midwife provides routine care on a 24 hours basis, and delivery services.

Moreover COOPI has identified a system of external structures, private hospitals and government clinics, to whom refer the children with more complicated conditions. The Holy Mary Children's Clinic is the principal referral point for all the children needing more specialized treatment. HMC is a private non profit pediatric hospital, where referred children have free access to appropriate medical care. This agreement COOPI-HMC has been very important especially during the first year after the Freetown attack. In the government hospital it was difficult to appropriately care the child-soldiers, since the resentment against them was still very high and the children behavior was often arrogant and violent. The health care of the child-soldier can not be separated from a psychological care, thus the HMC have been organized many workshops about how to deal with traumatized children, and also sensitization meetings to strength the staff motivations. This effort enable HMC to give an high quality health care to ex-combatant children.

The children are reunified only if their health conditions are estimated satisfactory by the doctor. Each child has sanitary card with the report of his/her health status. During all the follow up period children have access to free health care. A child may present him/herself for treatment, but more commonly they are referred by the follow up social worker. Children seldom take the initiative to seek medical help and often require some persuasion to consult a doctor. To improve the delivery of medical service to reunified children, a sensitization campaign has been conducted with schools and skills training institutions. These institutions are encouraged to inform the COOPI team if they perceive a problem with a child's health.

#### **4.9.2 Health Education**

The health education program concerning the activities held in the centers and in the Holy Mary Clinic, begun in October 2000. Activities organized in the centers are targeted to the children and to the staff. Arguments treated are: personal care, infections and parasitic diseases prevention, sexual care and basic health care for children. Courses addressed to children were first given by the center's doctor, but then they were integrated with a whole set of other activities proposed and organized by the nurses, the teachers and the care-givers. Such activities have been incorporated within the center daily life, by means of songs, dances and tales. Children health education is now completely demanded to nurses and teachers, while the doctor has maintained only a counseling and supervising role. The courses addressed to the staff are organized as thematic workshops, attended by the whole staff, from the center supervisor to the chef. To give an idea of the arguments treated, we can mention the effects of drug abuse, HIV prevention or the medical care required by children under five years old. The workshops are held by doctors within the centers.

The most relevant work on health education was carried with the girls in Conforti, which constitute an extremely vulnerable subject. They revealed great difficulties in managing pregnancy and suckling. Problems to this regard are related either to violence suffered and to the lack of education. Besides psychological support provided by the psycho-social team, many health care courses were organized in the HMC center. These courses are opened to all girls in the area, so to encourage contacts with the local community.

### **4.9.3 Discussion**

According to the COOPI medical coordinator the main problems related to health education encountered in the last two years are the following:

1. some children suffer from illness like tuberculosis that require a period in the hospital longer than the six weeks allowed by the program. To cure a child after reunification is in fact too expensive and complicated.
2. The young mothers in Conforti have often caused problems difficult to face. The abuses suffered left deep traumas reflected in the care of the children born from such violence. Children are often mistreated and underfed. A few cases of death were not completely clarified. It is therefore essential to underline that children health condition do not only depend on the medical assistance provided by the center or on the mothers health education, but also and more importantly on the violence suffered by the girls. Sometimes a psychological support can be enough to facilitate accepting the child, sometimes it can be necessary a permanent separation.
3. Finally, COOPI relationship with governative clinics is made difficult by the lack of transparency in such structures. The costs of the medical assistance is often enlarged or missing of adequate justification. This affects negatively the economical report to COOPI donors.

Future planning of the child protection program from the medical point of view require to move the attention from the ex-combatants only, to all the children of the community. In a post-emergency phase, to follow only reunified children could be reductive and cause discrimination mechanisms. In fact, reintegrated children have often access to medical resources which are much better than the

ones available for other children. This could be justified in the emergency phase, to support the host families. Now the efforts must be addressed to the creation of a network of clinics for all the children of the community. Enforcing the medical infrastructure is a fundamental step to exit the emergency phase.

## **5 Child protection program and local communities**

The child protection program in Sierra Leone is undergoing an important change from an emergency stage, to a post emergency one. New strategies and priorities need to be identified in order to effectively address the children changing needs. The starting point of such analysis must be the evaluation of the present status of the program. The research reported here aims at estimating the impact of the child protection program on the local community in the Western Area of Sierra Leone, in particular the aim is :

1. To consider the impact of the child protection program on the development of local association or organizations of the civil society, that could be able to prevent further recruitment of child soldiers;
2. To analyze the reintegration of the ex-combatant children in their family and community;
3. To have a feedback from the local community on the child protection program, in order to identify new strategies that better address children needs.

The research focuses on the work of the Family Homes Movement (FHM) and COOPI. Interviews with children, NGOs staff and representatives of the civil society, were conducted between September and November 2001. This community base analysis leads to some strategic guidelines for a new post-emergency phase of the child protection program.

### **5.1 Research Methodology**

Research for this study was carried out in the area around the COOPI and FHM centers: in Lakka area during the second half of September 2001 and in Calaba Town the first two weeks of October 2001. The information reported here was gathered from semi-structured interviews with the community leaders: the chief of the community, the elders, the religious leaders, the woman and youth association chairmen, the teachers and head masters of primary and secondary schools, the head masters of the skill training centers and the policemen. Moreover the families of the reintegrated children in the area have been visited, and interviews conducted with the parents or the foster family and with the child reunified. Finally interviews were carried on with the ICC staff including managers, caregivers, psychosocial workers and teachers.

In the case of Lakka the research has been more focused on the relationship between the St Michael ICC, the YMCA transit center and the local community, rather than on the evaluation of the process

of reintegration of the ex-combatants children. This area was little affected by the war, and not many children have been abducted in Lakka. Moreover the centers do not foster children in their own area; thus there are few reintegrated children in Lakka and Ogoo Farm. On the contrary Calaba Town was one of the most affected area during the rebels attack on January 6, and hundred of children were abducted there. Thus Calaba Town is a preferred area for evaluating the reintegration process of ex-combatants children.

## **5.2 Lakka**

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

The research was carried out in Lakka and Ogoo Farm, the closest villages to the St Michael ICC and to the YMCA transit center. This area is southwest of Freetown, and it is connected to the city through a road (30 minutes driving), thus it is between a rural and urban environmental.

64 houses spread between the road and the sea, with 840 inhabitants form Lakka. Ogoo Farm is extended along the road, with 6.000 inhabitants. The main income generating activities are fishing and tourism for Lakka, and agriculture and trade along the road for Ogoo Farm. Before the war there was a French hotel on the beach that gave employment to a big fraction of the population.

The war did not affect a lot these villages, the women use to say, “this is an area blessed by God”. The houses have not been destroyed and the population has no suffered the atrocities typical of the rebel war in Sierra Leone. According to the Ogoo Farm chief, Mr. Bay, the main effects of the war have been the growth of the population, due to the massive arrival of displaced people; the escape of the NGOs that were working on agriculture projects (as plan international), the end of the tourism, and the worsening of the road conditions that slow down the trade activities.

The following paragraphs provide an overview of the impact that St Michael and YMCA centers have had on the local economy and social structure, and on the local schools. Moreover it is presented an analysis on the changes applied on the center methodology as a result of the interaction with the local community.

### **5.2.2 FHM analysis and strategy on the relationship with the community**

When FHM started the child protection program, in 1997, Lakka was considered as the best place where to locate the center, for two main reasons. On one side, FHM has been active in Lakka for a long time. On the other side, Lakka was little affected by the war and is rather isolated. It was therefore thought that the global impact on the local community would have remained limited. Soon

after the center opened, it was realized that a conflict was nevertheless unavoidable, due to the poverty and the living conditions of people in Lakka, which made them, think at the center as a place for privileged. The children of the center were accused of robberies, fires, and violent behavior. This was the excuse for the population to organize an armed attack to the center, during the 2000 spring.

The attack showed that the community was a potential risk for the centers, and could not be ignored any more. A sensitization program was started, involving all the population. Shows and exhibitions were organized to explain the issue of child protection. Moreover, FHM organized a school support program, as a benefit for all the children of the community. Finally, some economical development projects were also started to increase the positive feedback on the population. Although some groups still do not feel affected by these benefits, as the case of the local Churches, the relationship between FHM and the community has now improved considerably. According to the FHM head of mission, the community was first considered as a risk, as something to be controlled. Now, on the basis of the relationship established, the community itself is a resource for the child protection program.

### **5.2.3 Social-Economic Impact**

Information on the local economy have been provided by the Lakka chief Mr. Mustafa, the Ogoo Farm chief Mr. Bay, the Lakka Women Association representative and the chairman of the Youth Development Organization of Ogoo Farm, Mr. Dauda.

The impact of the centers, especially of St Micheal, on the social-economic structure of the local community has been relevant. The reason for this is twofold. On the one side, FHM has been present in the area since many years, thus developing strong and deep relations, on the other side the dimensions of St. Michael center, capable of hosting 300 children, is a remarkable presence in village of 800 people.

The economical impact can be resumed in the following points:

1. **Employment.** The employment provided by the centers is one of the main resources for the local economy. The chief of Lakka argues that the income of the 20 St. Michael employees sustain the majority of the families;

2. **Development projects.** FHM has promoted development projects, as the construction of a boat for Lakka fishermen and the support of a youth association in a small economical activity, a bar on the beach. Moreover, FHM has financed a mechanic laboratory for youth training;
3. **Society organization.** The Youth Development Organization, promoted and supported by FHM, is aimed at the development of agricultural projects.

It can be argued that the presence and activities of the centers in the villages of Lakka and Ogoo Farm, has created a strong dependency of the villages on the centers, due to the employment opportunities offered thereby. Nevertheless, it is important to point also at the human capital increase, caused by the employees training. Moreover, the development projects have stimulated the local community to organize themselves in associations, able to plan and organize the economical development of the village.

#### **5.2.4 Cultural impact**

The centers have organized many activities to sensitize the community about the child protection issue. People in the villages always refer to the following arguments:

1. The community is responsible for the children, their education and for the prevention of further recruitment.
2. If the community fails in the reintegration of ex-combatant children, they have no other choice than going back to join the armed groups. The peace process is thus strongly related to the community capability of receiving the ex-combatant children.
3. The child soldiers are not responsible for the atrocities, since they have been abducted and drugged.

These concepts are in the speeches of chiefs and community leaders as well as common people from the villages. Even a displaced family from Kono, that has strongly suffered because of the rebel war, and is now living close to the St. Michael center, agrees on the necessity of helping the ex-combatants children, in order to avoid other wars. They still refer to the children in the center as "rebels", but they understand the necessity of their reintegration as the only way to reach peace. Moreover FHM has helped this family to start an activity of wood selling. For this reason, they also consider the child protection as a resource for their own family.



The community, not only as an economic but also as a cultural resource has considered the presence of the centers. The dialog with FHM is considered relevant for the community concern about educational issues, the peace process and the community development. Since this interaction started, new associations have been formed, as the Community Liaison Committee, aimed at managing the relation between the community and St. Michael, the Educational Committee, monitoring the local school, organizing meeting with the teachers and supporting poor children in attending school.

### **5.2.5 School system impact**

Information about the center impact on the local school system have been provided by interviews with the teachers and the headmasters of the informal primary school in Lakka, the primary school in Ogoo Farm and the primary and secondary school in Hamilton. Moreover, the YDO chairman, promoting the building of a nursery school in Ogoo Farm, has been interviewed

The center strategy is focused on supporting schools in the local community to avoid the ex-combatants children to be seen as privileged ones. Many children in the village cannot attend school at all, for economic reasons, while the children inside the centers attend an informal school. Support to the local school is thus aimed at demonstrating that the child protection program regards all the deprived children and, again, is a resource for the whole community.

As in all Sierra Leone, the school situation in these villages is affected by the lack of adequate structures, of benches and chairs, of books and school materials. Moreover, teacher's income is extremely low and unsure due to administrative delays. Therefore children have to contribute to the economical management of the school with fees, which are often too high for the family income.

However, the school situation in Lakka and Ogoo Farm has been improving during the last two years. Around 90% of the children go to school. This result has been achieved through the informal school in Lakka. This school, started in 1997 inside the St Michael center for the IDP, is now in a community house in Lakka, hosting more than 200 children otherwise excluded by the formal schools.

The primary school of Ogoo Farm has 6 classes with around 500 children. The school is well equipped but overcrowded: there are up to 100 children in a class. The FHM has started a

discussion with the schoolteachers about how to expand the room available. At the moment of writing, this discussion is still ongoing.

The primary and secondary school of Hamilton is the one more strongly related to the FHM center. Children that stay in the center for a long period of time due to difficulties in the reunification process are enrolled in the Hamilton school. FHM supports the school in many different ways, with structural works, school materials, furniture and workshop for training teachers in dealing with difficult children.

The center impact on the school system can be outlined in the following points:

1. teachers see in the NGOs the first resource of support since they do not trust in the government help. There is therefore a strong dependency on the humanitarian organizations.
2. As a consequence of such relationship, FHM has been trying to encourage an attitude of responsibility in the community, towards the schools. This effort has led to important results, like the above mentioned Educational Committee, that monitors and supports the school activities, and more generally, the teachers awareness of playing an essential role for the community. Nevertheless, involving the community in concrete and "free" help to the school is still difficult.
3. The presence of ex-combatant children in the school poses the emphasis on the necessity for teachers to be prepared to handle tensions and tough situations that these children may cause in a class. As a result, such presence increases the professionalism of the teachers, and makes them privileged interlocutors for the NGOs.

## **5.3 Calaba Town**

### **5.3.1 Introduction**

Calaba Town is located at the East End of Freetown, about five miles away from the center. It covers the land area of approximately two square miles and is subdivided into five sections (Mayenkinah, Robis, Calaba Town West, Pipe Line, Palmuronkoh).

Calaba Town was one of the areas that were more strongly affected by the war. Before the January 6<sup>th</sup> rebel invasion, Calaba Town had a total population of about 35,000 inhabitants and about 1,300 houses. Due to the massive destruction, 98% of the houses were destroyed, about 1,000 people were killed, and 400 girls were raped and abducted.

The social-political administration of Calaba Town is complex and rapidly changing. It reflects the twofold organization of the society. On one side, people belong to tribes, sharing the same language and customs. On the other side, as mentioned above, five sections divide the town into different administrative domains. Tribe distinctions do not coincide with these sections.

Each tribe has its own leader, called "chief". The tribe-chiefs have become extremely important after the war, due to the massive arrival of displaced people in town. They are the first points of reference for people coming from the provinces that not always can speak krio and are not used to the urban life. The tribe-chiefs became part of the political administration of Calaba Town, joining the former administration composed by the chiefs of the sections. All the tribe and section chiefs refer to a superior authority that is responsible for all Calaba Town.

The economy of Calaba Town, completely destroyed during the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack, is now starting over again. The most important income generating activities are located along Bai Bureh Road, a main road leading to Freetown. Typical activities are fuel trading, public transport and moto-mechanichs shops. There are also a sponge factory in Fomex and a tailoring factory in Sayeno Junction where about 200 people work. Women are instead generally occupied with petty trading in local markets.

For development programs, each section in the community is organized into Community Development Committees (CDC) headed by a chairman and his executives. Each CDC operates with internal animators who collect and interpret information on behalf of the community.

### **5.3.2 Relationship with the community**

The child protection program in Calaba Town is relevant not only because of the three COOPI centers, but also because many children have been reintegrated in this area. In 1999 the Conforti Center for child mothers was founded in Pipe Line. In this center, girls remain for a relatively long time, at least until the delivery. During this period, the girls have many opportunities to interact

with the local community, by simply walking in the streets or going to the markets. As a result, the center is well known and accepted by most of the population of Pipe Line.

In the New Transit Center (NTC), opened in 2000 in Bangura Street, Robis, children stay for a much shorter time. One month, on average. The opportunities for the children to get in touch with the local population are therefore limited, also because during their transit, children follow center based activities organized by central staff and other social workers from the different teams within COOPI (Social Reintegration, Economic Training Unit ETU, Education Reintegration ERT, Sensitization and Psychosocial). All these activities are geared towards preparing children before reunification for the purpose of sustainable and permanent reintegration into the families and communities of origin. Thus children are always busy inside the center and most of the people of Calaba Town ignore the presence of a center for ex-combatants.

Differently from the case of Lakka, the population has not opposed the centers. This is due to several reasons. First of all, the centers in Calaba Town were opened one year later, when all the sensitization programs performed by the NGOs began to show some effects. Moreover, the centers of Calaba Town could take advantage of the former experience on Lakka. Finally, the impact of an external presence like a center on a small community like the village of Lakka is definitely higher than the one on a sub-urban area of more than thirty thousand people.

Recently, a new Drop-in Center has opened, to perform counseling activities on sexual abuse. The Drop-in center is not a residential structure for ex-combatant children, but is meant to be a reference point for all the people. Its characteristics reflect a new approach in child protection that will be treated in more detail in a separate section.

The communication strategy for the child protection program with the community of Calaba Town is focused on the reintegrated children. Whereas in Lakka the problem was the relationship between the center and the population, in Calaba Town a further step is done, and the population is now relating with the reintegrated children. Therefore, the preferred stakeholders for this communication are found in schools, apprenticeship and skill training programs, families of the ex-combatants, with the aim of building a sympathetic social environment.

### **5.3.3 Social-economic impact**

As described in the introduction, Calaba Town is a high-populated sub-urban area, with complex social dynamics. Therefore, the impact of the three centers has remained globally limited.

The relationship between the centers and the society is carried out mostly through the reintegrated children, in the places and environments they live.

The most important one is the school. In Calaba Town there are 13 primary school and one secondary school. Most of the children from the centers are enrolled in S. Peter in the Rock primary school, which, with its 1800 students, is the biggest school in the area. About 70 ex-combatants now attend S. Peter in the Rock. According to the UNICEF CEIP project, for each reintegrated child, the school - not directly the child - is given a package containing books, pencils and other material. This allows to support the schools in the reintegration process without making the ex-combatants appear as privileged children. Moreover, COOPI has provided benches for the school and furnitures for the teachers. The same strong relationship has been established with most of the formal schools in the area. As a result, the program of COOPI is well known by all the teachers, they are aware of the child protection issues and of the role they play in it.

The older children, that cannot attend the primary school, are enrolled in the skill training centers, where young and adults can learn a job. Typical fields of occupation are tailoring, gara dying, soap making, hairdressing, carpentering and moto-mechanics. The centers, managed by local associations, have undergone a strong development process in the last years. This is due to the income generating potential of such occupations, and also to the attention received by the international NGOs, willing to support local initiatives.

The population perceives the training centers as the starting point for the development of the community, both from an economical point of view, and also from a social one. In fact, the training centers are the place for many other activities like workshops, forums and adult literacy. Therefore, a rich network of social relationships, linking together different generations and groups, always grows around these centers. The strong belonging characterizing the members is very effective on the reintegration of ex-combatant children, to rebuild their identity in a civil life. Due to the social importance of the training centers, supporting them provides an indirect way of performing educational activities on the society, about peace and reintegration.

Following an approach similar to the one used towards school, COOPI supports the more than 30 skill training center that host reintegrated children, with tools, materials and school fees.

One of the biggest training centers is the Integrated Development Organization (IDO). It was founded in 1994, for adult education. After the destruction of January 6<sup>th</sup>, the British High Commissioner rebuilt it and the activities restored. Now it hosts more than 15 ex-combatants children from the COOPI program. As an example of the educational activities inducted by the reintegration program, it is worth mentioning the organization of the Sierra Leone Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace, a program covering different topics, from the identification of income generating opportunities, health education, good governance and democracy.

Other social entities are the religious groups, both Muslim and Christian, and the elder associations. Most of the population in Calaba Town is Muslim, thus the mosques play an important role in the social life. The mosque is the place to meet for praying, discussing, learning and getting support. Also the associations of elder are relevant inside the civil society of the area, since they are responsible for the development of the community. COOPI has been relating with these social entities mostly in the first period of the program, when many sensitization activities have been organized to smooth the impact of the child protection centers.

#### **5.3.4 *Child reintegration***

The study of the child reintegration has been done mostly by the discussion with the COOPI social-workers, responsible for the follow up, and by informal interviews with the children reintegrated, their parents, their families and neighbors.

As described in the previous chapter, reintegration is a complex process, starting when the child is still in the center. FHM is responsible for the family tracing. The social-workers trace the family and establish relationships with the parents. After reunification, COOPI social-workers are responsible for the follow up. They are supposed to meet the child on weekly base, checking his conditions, the health status and his relationship with the family and the community. Moreover they are responsible for the enrollment of the child at school or in a training center. For the first year, COOPI supports the children in school, paying school fees and uniforms, and covers the health care expenses.

The problems related to the children reintegration have changed during the three years of program implementation. During the first year the problems were mostly related to the population hate

towards the ex-combatants children. Families were not ready to accept back their children, girls with child were refused as mother of a “rebel” and adolescent boys were not accepted for their arrogant behavior. But after two years these problems seems solved thank to the huge work of sensitization done by COOPI and the other UNICEF implementing agencies.

Now the main problems the social-workers have to deal with are related to the expectations of the families. Children are usually reintegrated in extremely poor families, thus requests of financial support are very common. Social-workers cannot meet these requests, which are out of the COOPI program. Sometimes the requests for financial support are so pressing to limit the effectiveness of the follow-up process, leading, in the worst cases, to an interruption of the social-worker visits to the family.

Information on the reintegration effectiveness was collected by interviewing about 25 children and their families in the Calaba Town area. The criteria used for choosing the children, was defined to have a complete view of the reintegration process along time, age and among genders.

The first important fact to notice is that reintegrated children seem not to exhibit many relational problems. According to the families and to the children themselves, they were able to establish good relationship with the community surrounding and their past of ex-combatant apparently does not poses strong limitations on the social life. This is always true for children below 12 years. In all other cases it remains true, but with some exceptions. One of such exceptions was found for an older child that reported strong psychological disease, related to sexually disturbed behavior. This was the cause for the failure of the child reintegration because he escaped from the family.

Another exception regards girls with babies from the rebels that are difficulty accepted by the families. Finally, economical problems can became so important to turn into relational problems. This was the case of a child, accused of bad behavior, in order to find a justification for the family inability to sustain the child. Although further work is necessary, it seems that a psychological support to the reintegrated children is now less urgent than it used to be.

Interviews with the children that were reunified by more than one year revealed all the problems related to the sustainability of the reintegration program. Generally when the support of COOPI finishes the family is not able any more to pay the school fee and the child leave the school.

Special attention has been put in the analysis of the girl reintegration. From the COOPI list 19 addresses of girls that have been reintegrated more than one year ago were chosen. For these girls

the support of COOPI closed, thus it is possible to evaluate the sustainability of their reintegration. All the addresses were located in the east part of Free Town, from Kissy to Calabatown, and Waterloo. The age of the girls was between 13 and 18 years old. Of the 19 girls chosen it was possible to meet only 13: 10 reintegrated with their families and 3 placed in an independent living program. From the 4 addresses in IDP camps it was possible to meet only one girl, since the others 3 moved with their family back to the provinces. One of the reintegrated girls died last November, and two girls were sent by the family to live with other relatives for lack of space and resources. In this period of relevant population movements and social evolution is difficult to follow the reintegrated children when they exit the program. Often the children are reintegrated in a temporary situation, families move back to the region they came from, as soon as the security conditions allows them. Moreover children are sent to live with others relatives when the support of COOPI closes. The information collected from the girls were:

1. The number of children they have; if they had a child while they were with the fighting forces, and if they had other children since they have been reunified.
2. If they attend a school or a skill training center.
3. The quality of the relationship with their families.

The result are the following:

1. Among the 13 girls met, 7 are mother. 3 of them have only the child born during the war , while 4 have also other children born after reintegration. Among these 4, there are the 2 girls placed in the independent living program. The girls who did not have a child during the war do not have a child also after the reunification.
2. Among the 13 girls met, 7 are attending an education program. 6 are inside skill training program ( 3 of them are the ones in the IL program, and COOPI still supports the skill training school fee) and 1 attends school. The remaining 6 are occupied in petty trading.
3. All the girls and families say that the reintegrated girls do not have any relational problems with the community.

These results show that the girls are accepted back to society without big conflicts: families do not refuse the girls with their children as at the beginning of the program. The sensitization work done by COOPI was extremely important in achieving ex-combatants girls not be left alone. However the reunified girls are still victim of many prejudices. People say that those girls that were raped by the rebels know what is sex even if they are very young, and men use this excuse to perpetrate the abuse. Thus the risk to be sexually abused is higher for ex-combatants girls than the others girls in



the community. The level of this risk depends on the situation. For young girl without a child, reintegrated with their family, the risk is lower. But for older girl with a child the risk increases, since for them the possibility to get married are very low, the family considers them as women and has no interest in protecting them from pregnancy. For this reason these girls often have other children after reunification. The risk of sexual abuse increases further for the girls in the independent living program. Since they do not have the economical support of the family, after the COOPI support closed, they often use sex as an instrument to achieved protection from the men in the community. Few of them enter in the prostitution market.

The enrollment of girls in secondary school is very low, since the families prefers the girls learn a job. Only 4 of the 10 families met decide to pay an other year of skill training after the support of COOPI closed. Thus also for the girl, as in general for all the reintegrated children, their education stops with the COOPI support.

It can be argued that a possible solution is to extend the follow up for more that one year. This will only delay the problem, if in the meantime the family does not develop some income generating activity that will make the child school enrollment sustainable. Moreover, school enrollment is a more general problem, affecting all the children, not only the ex-combatants. Therefore, if in the emergency phase was correct to focus on the follow up of the child soldiers, after the emergency is passed, it is necessary to face the child protection issue in a more general way.

## **6 Conclusions**

The child protection program in Sierra Leone, that has provided immediate care for over 4,400 children from the fighting forces in 13 interim care centers and through alternative care programs, is passing now through a transitional phase, from first emergency to recovery and rehabilitation. This delicate phase requires an accurate analysis about the effects that the emergency program has provoked on the local community, in order to identify which are the positive dynamics induced in the civil society. The child protection program should refer to these positive dynamics as the main resource for the new phase of the intervention.

The field research done in Lakka and Calaba Town has shown that the child protection program in the last two years has induced mechanisms of self-organization on the civil society, in particular relating to the educational issues.

The lack of resources for the education of the young generations has always been considered as one of the main problems of the Sierra Leonean society. The RUF propaganda was centered on the free education issues. The rebel war, fought by adolescents and children, was strongly connected to the exclusion of the young generations from the society and from the education system. Thus the people consider education as the key point for a sustainable peace. In this context the child protection program has been considered as a valuable resource, not only from the financial but also from the cultural point of view. The population has been very receptive to the sensitization programs, because these programs showed the possibility of a way out from the war. The idea that the peace process depends on the community ability to reintegrate in the society and educate the children is commonly stated. People always says, both in Lakka and in Calaba Town, that the main change induced by the war is the new awareness of their rights and their responsibility

The strong relationship held by the child protection program with the schools, the skill training centers and the youth associations put into great consideration a while class of people: teachers, trainers and community leaders. As the society awareness about the child protection issues was growing, their importance and consideration in the society grow correspondingly. For this reason it worth to invest energies in the formation and training of these persons that can play a relevant role in the development of the society. The development of the skill training centers in Calaba Town can be considered as an example in this sense.

As described in the previous sections, these centers are the preferred place for youth education, especially those young that are excluded from the secondary school. Moreover, in these centers the community gathers to join workshops, forums and social education programs. Therefore the development of the training centers has been identified as the positive dynamics induced by the child protection program.

Starting from this observation, the new phase of child protection should not only focus on ex-combatant, but to all the children, in a community based approach. The priority of the emergency phase was to reintegrate ex-combatant children, and to avoid their going back to the rebel groups. The first results of this phase were expected within a short timeline, and were mostly achieved through the ICCs, the transit centers and the follow up. The high risk for the society, constituted by the ex-combatant children, required to concentrate all the efforts on them, at the price of making them appear as "privileged". It was therefore preferable to have them at school even if other children in the same family could not, and even if the economic support coming from the NGOs was only to last for the limited time of a year. From this research it has emerged that the goals of the emergency phase have been reached. Children have been almost always reintegrated in their families and for the first year have successfully attended school.

The new rehabilitation phase will last for a longer time. The main goal will be to reinforce all the structures of the society relevant to the child protection, in order to prevent other crisis and to favor the transition to the development phase. The role of the INGOs should therefore aimed at promoting the coordination of the local educational activities, like the training centers and the schools. Taken on their own, these realities presents strong limitations due to the small dimensions, small economic resources and low skill of trainers. On the other hand, from a coordination of the efforts there would be benefits in terms of:

1. **access to higher funding:** local association do not have the necessary administrative skills to be eligible for international donors. If they coordinate among themselves and with INGO the access to funds increases.
2. **formation of teachers and trainers:** the international NGO could play a relevant role in training the community leaders, organizing workshops and courses for all the coordinated associations.

3. **possibility of monitoring the young situation:** the coordination could collect reliable data on the young situation, and promote studies about the social inclusion of young generations.
4. **better planning :** a coordination of local educational activities can avoid a bad distribution of resources.
5. **support to the children otherwise excluded from education.** Only inside a coordination of local educational activities is possible to organize a sustainable child protection program to help disadvantaged children to reach education.

This strategy would be an effective prosecution of the child protection program, and a concrete support for the enforcement of the civil society. Thus to conclude this research we can say:

1. the ex-combatant children have been successfully reintegrated in their families and communities, but the risk of a further recruitment is still present, since the problems of young generation social exclusion are not solved;
2. the main impact of the child protection program on the civil society is the development of association and organizations in the local community, working with young generations;
3. such organizations can be the starting point for a strategy of the new phase in the child protection program, in a community based approach.

An example of this kind is the Dropping Center (DC) organized by COOPI in Calabatown. The DC is a community center dealing with sexual abuse issues. The service offered is not only counseling and medical and legal support to people victim of sexual abuses, but it is also to increase the awareness of the community around this problem . Workshops are organized with groups of teachers, policemen, and community elders, dealing issues as : what is a rape, which are the rape psychological consequences, which is the responsibility of the community in protecting women human rights.

## **7 Recommendations**

It is important to:

1. Carefully analyze the results of the child protection program during the first emergency phase, in order to properly plan the emerging needs of the Sierra Leonean children in the post emergency phase;
2. Identify some quantitative indices for evaluating the effectiveness of the reintegration process, and perform a statistical analysis on them;
3. Provide the reintegration staff with training in monitoring and evaluation to develop capacity, and encourage regular monitoring and reporting to improve agencies ability to protect children. The training should include information on gender issues;
4. Develop a community based approach for the child protection program, by increasing the potential of local educational organizations; promoting the local capability of monitoring and understanding the children situation in order to increase the society awareness of the children needs
5. Develop community centers on the model of the Drop-in center, on general issues like health care, sexual abuses or right to education, issues that involve all the children inside the community.
6. The end of the emergency phase should not mean the end of the child protection program. Since the government will not be able to implement a child protection program until the elections, donors can not stop funding INGO to strength the social networks and prevent further crisis.

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