

## Key Findings from the National Child Protection Campaign A Report on the Intervention of Search for Common Ground

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) is an international non-governmental organization that works to transform the way the world deals with conflict: away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions. SFCG in Sierra Leone was established in 2000 and uses a unique two-pronged approach to peace building that couples media work with on the ground peace building activities. SFCG's strategy stimulates grassroots solutions to community problems through the establishment of community radio stations, solidarity events, coalition building, community dialogues, live dramas, and training workshops. In doing so, SFCG engages local and international organizations, as well as the Sierra Leonean government in the process and incorporates outreach into its media programming, bringing community issues into the national media dialogue. The strategy focuses on four priority issues: corruption, quality education, good governance, and those marginalized out of the decision-making process, specifically youth, women and children.

### RESEARCH SCOPE

Children were at the core of Sierra Leone's 10-year war with 10,000 child soldiers and thousands more victimized by its brutality. Fragile peace is being sustained for the moment, but there is great concern about the well-being and future of Sierra Leone's children as they find themselves impoverished and frequent targets of drug use, prostitution, and trafficking. To draw attention to the growing crisis of Sierra Leone's children and youth, SFCG partnered with NGO's and community organizations to implement UNICEF's national Child Protection Campaign. The campaign's purpose was to raise awareness and trigger proactive action concerning six child protection priorities. For five months, a number of taskforces collaborated to raise awareness using tools such as radio, print, drama, video, promotional materials, stakeholder trainings and a song competition to raise awareness. The campaign involved nearly 1,000 active participants from various groups and agencies and created over 850,000 interactions with the public, reaching over 25,000 adults and 15,000 children. Pre- and post-surveys and focus groups were used by SFCG to gather information on the issues directly, assess district priorities, evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign in raising awareness of the issues and assess the effectiveness of tools used to raise awareness.

The Child Protection Campaign focused on six priority issues:

- Children in the Criminal Justice System
- Child Trafficking
- The Children's Act
- Child Exploitation and Abuse
- Street Children
- Reintegration of Children Affected by War



A scene from a SFCG outreach drama in Kabala

### KEY FINDINGS

#### *Awareness of the Child Protection Campaign*

- 78% of survey respondents and 90% of focus group participants were aware of the campaign.
- When asked what they got out of the campaign, 68% reported knowledge/education and 60% reported awareness of issues. 51% were encouraged to participate in child protection issues.
- Survey respondents most frequently heard about the campaign on the radio (70%), through a drama performance (34%), or in a newspaper (33%). Respondents rated radio as the most effective outreach tool.

#### *The Six Priorities: Pre and Post-Campaign Results.*

- **Children in the Community Justice System.** Agencies define the age of a child differently, but survey respondents agreed that children

When asked to rank the six UNICEF priorities, in relevance to their communities, respondents ranked Sexual Exploitation and Street Children as first or second priorities in every county.

“Until we participated in the stakeholders’ training we had no idea that when a child is taken away from his home by someone who promises to help him, reneges on the promise and ends up maltreating him, that this is considered a form of trafficking. We didn’t know that there was any such thing as internal trafficking.”

- Joseph Syl Kurabu, Head of Bonthe Children’s Club

Respondents listed the critical issues facing children in the community as sexual harassment, drug addiction, child neglect, child abuse, separated homes or single parents, and hunger.

“Poverty also results in children being denied their fundamental human rights. The reduction of poverty must begin with child protection and realization of the human rights of children.”

- Head Teacher, Bonthe District

should be and are being treated differently than adults in the justice system. NGOs (83%), government agencies (78%), and Community Based Organisations (42%) were reported as taking the lead on child justice issues.

- **Child Trafficking/Internal Trafficking.** 98% of participants indicated that they are aware of people taking children away on promises of better opportunities, including educational support, better care, and the opportunity to go abroad. Focus groups demonstrated little awareness of internal trafficking, as it is common practice for children to live with people other than their parents. During the campaign, awareness of the Anti-Trafficking Act increased by 10%.
- **Children’s Act.** The Children’s Act was rated as a first or second priority in 3 of 6 areas surveyed, but overall there was little focus on the Act since it conflicts with traditional views of care giving and is difficult for many to understand.
- **Child Exploitation and Abuse.** 97% of respondents believe child exploitation is occurring in their communities. Sexual harassment was the most frequently mentioned critical community issue with beating/physical abuse and sexual abuse the most common types of exploitation occurring. Child labor was also mentioned with most adults (79%) and children (67%) reporting that children work to support their families.
- **Street Children.** Street children were cited as a major problem in nearly every community. The vast majority (pre-campaign survey 91%, post-campaign survey 87%) said there are organizations working with street children, providing shelters and drop-in centers, skills training and education though focus group discussions in Kabala, Koidu and Matru Jong indicated shortages of services.
- **Reintegration of Children Affected by War.** 49% of post-survey respondents believe all or nearly all children in their community were reintegrated after the war, however, this is inconsistent with UNICEF research on the success of reintegration. Responsibility for integration was attributed to the government (61%), NGOs (28%), and CBOs (9%). Overall, reintegration was not viewed as a priority.

### *Children’s Basic Needs and Challenges: Who is Responsible?*

- The majority of post-survey respondents said the role of parents and caregivers is to provide basic needs (93%), educate children (89%), and instill morals and discipline (<55%), while the role of the community is to provide protection (86%), teach children to be respectful and law abiding (77%), and to promote equal rights (56%). Respondents reported that authorities have a responsibility to provide education (72%), moral lessons (53%), and maintain the rights of children (23%).
- 86% of respondents reported seeing children neglected in the community, but 70% believe the authorities are doing something to meet children’s basic needs. Most respondents (76%) said there are laws in place to protect children but only 64% said they are enforced.

### *What is Causing the Problems?*

- **Poverty.** Poverty was identified as the main cause of most of the six UNICEF issues, specifically child trafficking (94%) and street children (89%), as well as the cause of other problems affecting children. In many cases promises of education (92%) or opportunities for better care (88%) drive impoverished parents to give their children to others.

“Our bylaws now conform with child protection rules, particularly those that relate to the Criminal Justice System. There are situations where we now refer children in conflict with the law to Mammy Queen and there are now separate jail cells for youth.”

- Youth Leader, Warawara Yagala Chiefdom, Kabala

Focus groups reported that the campaign helped them realize that traditional practices can lead to human rights abuses and internal trafficking.

#### **What did the Campaign involve?**

- 208 hours of radio programming
- 14 jingles and 11 spot messages
- 43 hours airing 61 radio discussions
- 13 video clip series
- one video documentary
- 12 Golden Kids skits
- 37 live drama performances in 13 districts
- 13 local drama performances
- 6 print inserts produced and published in six national newspapers
- 5,000 posters, distributed in 13 districts
- National song competition
- 2 Training for trainers and 10 trainings for Child Protection stakeholders
- Creation of 13 taskforces to implement activities

- **Traditional Practices.** Customarily, children are viewed as property with the prevailing concept that harmful actions by caregivers are not crimes against children. According to both children and adults, parents (44%) and teachers (43%) are almost equally considered to be abusers.

#### **What Impact did the Campaign Have?**

- **Communities Reassess their Roles in Child Protection.** Prior to the campaign, survey respondents reported that the first role of the community was ‘to help children be respectful and law abiding with a distant second being ‘to protect children’. The campaign led to a significant change as post-campaign respondents listed ‘protecting children’ as the number one role of the community.
- **Attitudes in Communities.** When asked if the campaign changed attitudes in their communities, respondents overwhelmingly said yes (74%) with Moyamba District reporting the highest perceived level of change.
- **The Campaign and Children.** Three quarters of respondents said information obtained from the campaign helped parents to identify their roles and responsibilities. Other benefits mentioned were educational opportunities, changes in the mentality of street children, and counseling.
- **Awareness of Issues Leads to Change of Views.** In the pre-campaign survey, the most pressing issue identified in all districts was Street Children, followed by Exploitation and Abuse. In the post-survey these priorities were reversed putting Exploitation first.
- **Agencies Working Together.** One of the most significant benefits of the campaign was the collaboration developed between agencies that had previously worked in isolation. This collaboration leveraged the resources of agencies, increased their visibility, and created a sustainable network for future initiatives in which stakeholders show confidence. Talking Drum Studio also linked the local taskforces to community radio stations allowing them broader outreach.
- **Sustainability.** The creation of 13 taskforces in Freetown and 12 other districts ensured sustainability.

#### **What Interventions Worked?**

- **Radio.** Radio was recognized as the number one way people came to know about the child protection campaign with more than 540,000 hits.
- **Drama.** The drama series was staged by both local and Golden Kids groups and ranked next in impact. Participation was highest where community leaders were involved in planning the drama or recruiting audience members.
- **Print.** Print was used to target child protection agencies and policy makers and thus had a smaller impact in general.
- **Video.** Video clips were aired on TV, not in video houses, which require payment for service. This limited the population that could view the clips. Outreach programs would be a more effective way to distribute these clips in the future.
- **Promotional Materials.** 5,000 posters and 600 campaign t-shirts were distributed. The t-shirts were very popular and created a sense of involvement for taskforce members.
- **Song Competition.** Although it did not generate as many entries as was hoped, the song competition created a lot of excitement with those



Golden Kids Drama in Kabala

**SFCG recommendations:**

- Target children more directly
- Broadcast during prime time radio
- Increase outreach in rural areas
- Increase awareness and participation on Children's Act
- Sustain taskforces

involved, exposed the campaign to a large number of people, and resulted in popular songs that will continue to be aired. In the future, assistance with production costs for entrants may increase the number of entries.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Future efforts should target children more directly by leveraging the Kid's Clubs to stage dramas at the community level and airing broadcasts on Saturday.
- Radio broadcasts should be aired during prime time for maximum exposure.
- Activities should be extended beyond district headquarters and surrounding five-mile radius, reaching into more rural areas where trafficking and exploitation are more prevalent.
- Despite radio discussions and other activities, knowledge and awareness of the Children's Act was relatively low. It is recommended that efforts continue to increase awareness and fight perceptions that the Act is a matter only to be dealt with by the government.
- Taskforces should continue to develop work plans, clearly identifying priority issues for their areas and carrying out activities using existing resources, including the collaborative relationships developed between stakeholders during the course of the campaign.

### CONCLUSION

Overall the Child Protection Campaign was a success with 78% of survey respondents aware of the campaign. The targeted objectives were met although additional work is required to communicate with children more directly to make them aware of their rights, roles and responsibilities with respect to child protection. Success was seen as communities realized their roles in protecting children and as focus groups questioned traditional practices, putting into perspective the negative effects of some of these practices. These recognitions are key to changes in behaviors. More than 40,000 people were reached and nearly 1,000 actively participated in the campaign with success highest when community leaders were involved. This type of community involvement sets precedence for change as members unite to address key issues affecting children in their communities. Further, the campaign put in place sustainable structures, such as the taskforces that are continuing to address child-protection issues, to continue the campaign objectives. The key now is for communities to internalize these issues to create behavioral change.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Child Protection Campaign was launched in September 2005, and activities for this phase of the campaign were wrapped up in early March 2006. To evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign in increasing awareness, pre- and post- campaign surveys and focus groups were conducted to test the knowledge of a representative sample of the population. Respondents were approached using the intercept method and, in all, 586 people were surveyed both before and after the campaign. Focus groups were also conducted to test the results of the survey and, in the case of the pre-campaign focus group, to inform the campaign content. Results were tabulated and analyzed by an external firm. In addition, producers of the activities prepared activity evaluation forms and a performance-monitoring tool was used to monitor all activities.

*Source: March 2006 National Child Protection Campaign Final Report, prepared for UNICEF.*

*A copy of the report is available by contacting Frances Fortune, West Africa Regional Director, at [ffortune@sfcg](mailto:ffortune@sfcg).*