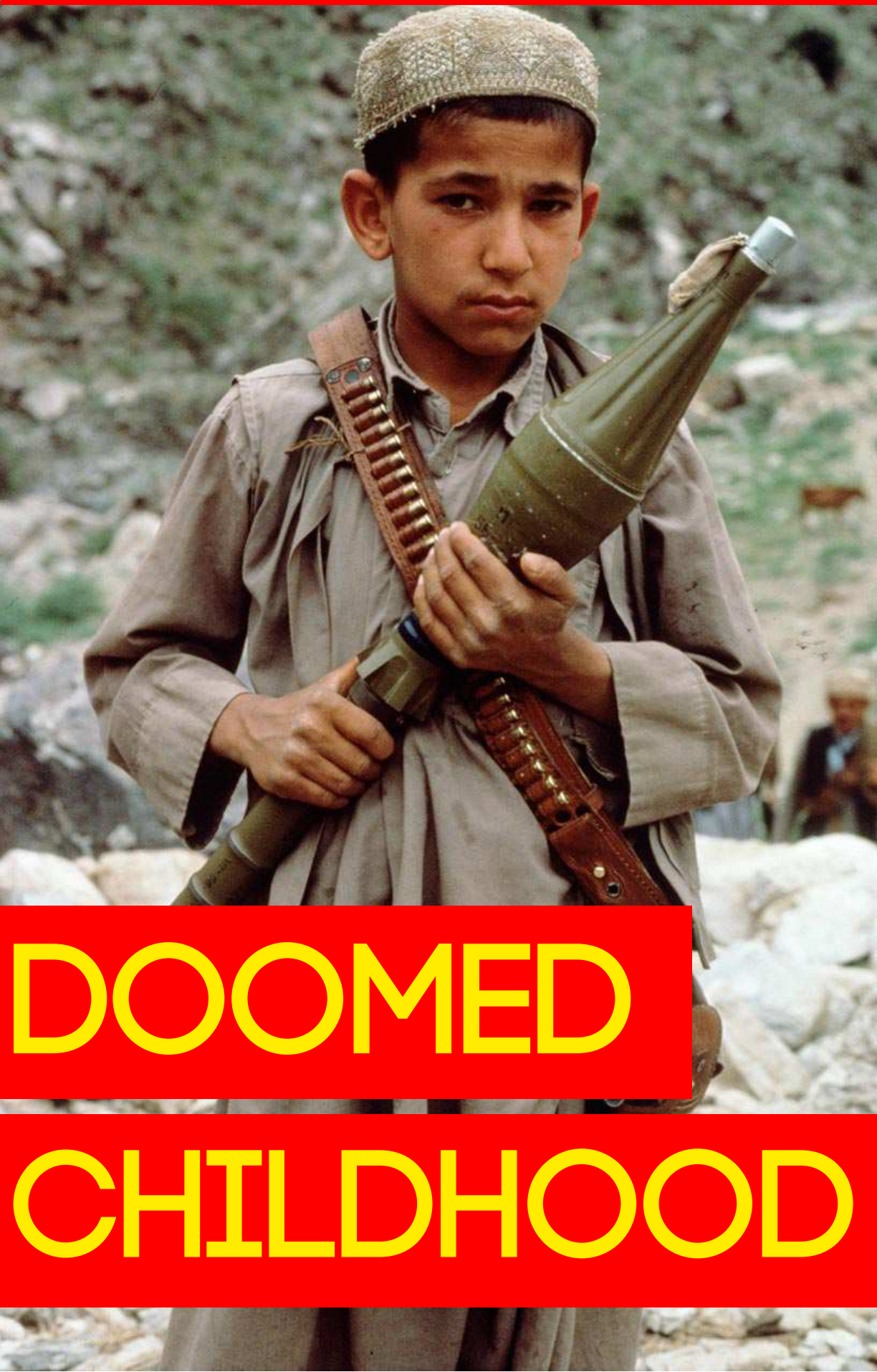


GLOBAL SOUTH

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What
has the
world
done for
child
soldiers,
children
at war
and
crises?

A New
Model for
Education
in Rural
Nepal

Latinos in
London:
Pride, not
Prejudice

DOOMED

CHILDHOOD

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Global South Development Magazine is a quarterly magazine published by Silver Lining Creation, Finland. The magazine covers a wide range of developmental issues primarily of the developing world and is an initiative of freelance writers and development activists from different parts of the world.

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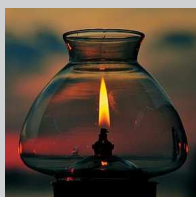
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More Inspiration Stories

Your 'inspiration' issue was a good read. It is great to see small initiatives bringing big changes in different communities. I think development and south-south cooperation should be based on sharing developmental knowledge or key to development found in different places.

Though GSDM is providing a few inspiration stories every now and then,

it would be great if there were more such stories or a regular 'inspiration' column.

And I think such inspirations should go beyond the non-profit world. There are a lot of development inspirations in the business world as well.
Rajneesh,
Kolkata, India



How Children Become Child Soldiers

The news piece 'Mali: Children Take up Guns' was heartbreaking. It's really sad to see how children have been used in war as instruments of inciting violence.

We were working for an international non-profit and were posted in an African country. Coincidentally, our job was to work with ex-child soldiers, conscripts and child-mercenaries. There were abductions, extortion and violence, but in some cases children had joined the rebels willingly, as a part of their survival strategy. The root cause was



abject poverty, of course, but joining the rebels or the army also meant security and more power. So without addressing poverty and security issues, we can't make this world free of child soldiers.

Paula & Barbara, USA

Post-War Life in Rural Nicaragua

I love photo stories published in your magazine. Post-War Life in Nicaragua published in the October issue was a very interesting read. Photos are excellent and made me somehow emotional. Congratulations! Diego Cupolo for producing

such a lively and vibrant account of the situation in Nicaragua.

I think it's in individual personal stories that we can see the depth and gravity of the situation. Hope to read more photo stories in Global South Development Magazine in the future.

Laura D.
Columbia



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Welcome to Child-Soldiers Special Edition



By MANOJ BHUSAL

"When development is equated with economic growth and understood merely in terms of GDPs and GNPs, there is a great risk: the risk of exclusion and neglect"

"One child's death in a Western city causes a global sensation, but death of a dozen children in an airstrike in rural Afghanistan remains virtually unnoticed. They might briefly appear in news corners and NGO archives, but they do not become part of a global debate, and that is unfair"



(c) Manoj Bhusal

When development is equated with economic growth and understood merely in terms of GDPs and GNPs, there is a great risk: the risk of exclusion and neglect. Segments of society that do not directly contribute to nation's economic progress might be forgotten and neglected. Powerless, underprivileged and marginalized populations disappear from development agenda and the gap between the haves and have nots further widens.

This edition of Global South Development Magazine looks at the faces that are often forgotten and made deliberately hidden. Though hundreds of children die each year in vicious wars and protracted conflicts in the South, and thousands serve as child soldiers, there isn't much global media attention on that. One child's death in a Western city causes a global sensation, but death of a dozen children in an airstrike in rural Afghanistan remains virtually unnoticed. They might briefly appear in news corners and NGO archives,

but they do not become part of a global debate, and that is unfair!

In this edition we present stories of child soldiers from across the globe and try to give a glimpse of the situation. Stories from Colombia, Sri Lanka, the DRC, and Mali will introduce you to the gravity of the situation. Apart from the cover story, you will also go through Diego Cupulo's photo essay on volunteering in Nicaragua, read an article about Latinos in London and get to know about a new model of education practiced in rural Nepal. Monica John's feature report on youth entrepreneurship in Tanzania is equally fascinating as well.

GSDM as a volunteer driven global movement is constantly progressing and we are committed to take it even further, to a greater height, but for that we need your continuous support and persistent love. And we hope to receive that. Happy reading!

(The editor can be reached at manoj.bhusal@silcreation.org)



Laptops for learning: Students at Ganesh Secondary School Baglung, Nepal use laptops to boost their learning. Government of Nepal and different donor agencies supply these green laptops to a few selected schools in Nepal. Photo: Manoj Bhusal/Global South Development Magazine



**International Day
for Mine
Awareness**

Ten-year-old Suleiman, from Dar Al Salam, North Darfur, suffered burns to more than 90 per cent of his body when his brother detonated an unexploded device that he found near their house in November 2006. Each year 4 April is observed as International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, to focus worldwide attention on the need for eliminating the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war. UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran

Europe's forced returnees claim abuse



An image from Medical Justice's 2008 Outsourcing Abuse report showing handcuff injuries sustained during an attempted forced removal from the UK in which the ex-detainee alleges excessive force was used by private security guards © Medical Justice

- Allegations of assault during forced removals – EU monitoring systems vary widely
- UK lacks monitoring, policy on appropriate level of restraint
- Returnees struggle to lodge complaints

Reported by Kristy Siegfried for IRIN, April 2013 – Cases of excessive force being used to remove rejected asylum seekers have been documented in a number of European countries. But with the financial crisis eroding sympathy and tolerance for asylum seekers, there has been little public or political support for measures that would provide more humane approaches to removing those reluctant to accept an asylum rejection.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the forced removal of failed asylum seekers “should be undertaken in a humane manner, with full respect for human rights and dignity, and that force, should it be necessary, [should] be proportional and undertaken in a manner consistent with human rights law”.

A directive on common standards and procedures for returning irregularly staying migrants, adopted by the European Parliament in 2008, included a provision requiring that

member states implement an effective system for monitoring forced returns. According to a study funded by the European Commission, by 2011, the majority of European Union countries had such a system or were in the process of implementing one.

But the systems vary widely between countries, both in terms of who does the monitoring and what they monitor.

Inconsistent oversight

For example, in the Netherlands – where incidents of excessive force being used on deportees are rare, according to the Dutch Refugee Council – an independent commission oversees the entire forced return process and guidelines are in place for the allowed use of force.

In France, monitoring only occurs during the pre-return stage or if a return attempt “fails”, either because of a last-minute legal intervention or because the pilot or crew on a commercial flight refuse to take the returnee. In the latter case, the

returnee is sent back to a detention centre where one of five NGOs contracted by the home affairs ministry has a presence.

Christophe Harrison, from one of the NGOs, France Terre d’Asile, told IRIN that these returnees regularly report excessive use of force by police escorts during attempted removals, but that it was difficult to know the real extent of the problem because “either they are effectively removed to their [home] country or they physically oppose their removal and are then often brought before a criminal judge, who usually condemns them to two to three months in prison.”

Lack of independent oversight is of particular concern when returns are conducted on charter flights carrying only deportees and their guards. Frontex, the EU’s joint-border agency, has made increasing use of charter flights to remove rejected asylum seekers from several different European countries.

“With the charter flights, the level

of restraint is even higher than on the commercial flights, but there are no witnesses,” said Lisa Matthews, from the UK-based National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns.

Behind closed doors

In the UK, which carried out over 40,000 forced removals and voluntary returns in 2012, civil society and the media have been reporting for years on the excessive use of force by private security guards contracted by the UK Border Agency (UKBA). A 2008 report by two UK-based NGOs – Medical Justice and the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns – and the law firm Birnberg Peirce & Partners documented nearly 300 cases of alleged assault during forced removals from the UK between 2004 and 2008. However, the UK opted out of the EU returns directive and has no monitoring system in place.

In 2010, Jimmy Mubenga, an Angolan asylum seeker who had lived in the UK with his family for 16 years, died while being restrained by guards during his removal. Witnesses on the flight said they heard Mubenga complaining that he could not breathe, but in July 2012 the Crown Prosecution Service ruled that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute the guards or their employer, G4S, a global security group.

A spokesperson with the UKBA said that members of Independent Monitoring Boards, which monitor the welfare of prisoners and immigration detainees, had observed a number of charter flights as part of a pilot exercise in 2012, but that “decisions have yet to be made about arrangements for this type of monitoring”.

Little has changed since Mubenga’s death, said Emma Mlotshwa of Medical Justice, which sends independent doctors to immigration detention centres to record injuries resulting from the alleged use of excessive force. “The death of Mubenga, we thought, would have some effect, but it hasn’t. It’s still something that’s happening pretty much behind closed doors,” she told IRIN.

The most common injuries Medical Justice’s doctors see are those related to the use of handcuffs, Mlotshwa said, but fractured bones and injuries consistent with the victim

having his or her head pushed down between the knees – an unauthorized method of restraint that can result in suffocation – have also been documented.

Marius Betondi, an asylum seeker from Cameroon, said he was so badly beaten by guards working for the contractor Tascor (previously called Reliance) during a removal attempt in January 2013 that he needs reconstructive surgery to his face and has blurred vision in his left eye.

He told IRIN over the phone from the UK that he had put up no resistance before the assault began.

“They [the guards] took me to the back of the aircraft and put a big red curtain around me so passengers would not be able to see me. They held me in a position whereby I couldn’t move because I was handcuffed, and then started punching me all over my face and body. I started bleeding terribly, and I was screaming, crying, asking for help. They continued for about 30 minutes, then I went unconscious. When I regained consciousness, they continued punching me.”

Betondi was eventually taken off the plane and returned to an immigration detention facility, where the manager informed the police. A police investigation is ongoing, which is rare in such cases, Mlotshwa said.

The UKBA is also investigating Betondi’s allegations, according to its spokesperson, who said that “physical intervention... is only used as a last resort or to enforce removal where the person concerned is non-compliant.”

Mubenga’s death has focused attention on UKBA’s lack of a detailed, publically available policy on what level of physical intervention is appropriate on an aircraft.

“When we looked at what was available publicly, it was striking that there was nothing relating to aeroplanes,” said Emma Norton, a lawyer with Liberty, a UK-based human rights NGO, adding that policy was clearly designed for use with potentially violent prisoners rather than failed asylum seekers. She noted that private security guards carrying out removals often receive only five days of control-and-restraint training, which does not include techniques for use on an aircraft.

Liberty’s request for a judicial review of the restraint policy was rejected last month when it emerged

that the Home Office was reviewing the policy and had contracted the National Offender Management Service to design a “bespoke” training package for UKBA and its private contractors. The UKBA spokesperson could not say when the new training guidelines would be implemented.

Ineffective complaints system

Most cases of excessive use of force come to light only when the removal fails. Even then, many victims do not have the opportunity to make a complaint. “When people are injured and the removal fails, removal directions may be sent again very quickly, before there’s time to get medical evidence, and while they are still weak from their injuries,” alleged Mlotshwa, of Medical Justice.

She said the complaints system in the UK is ineffective and lacks independence, as investigations are carried out by the Professional Standards Unit, a department of the Home Office. “Detainees are often not interviewed, CCTV footage goes missing, and injuries are often not photographed.”

UKBA’s spokesperson said “we take all complaints very seriously and ensure they’re investigated thoroughly and in a timely manner”, but Liberty’s Norton said none of the complaints her organization has assisted with have been upheld. For those who are successfully returned to their home countries, the obstacles are even greater.

Caroline Muchuma, from the Refugee Law Project (RLP) in Uganda, which provides legal and psycho-social assistance to deportees, said, “The vast majority of our clients report having been abused prior to or during deportation,” but many do not want to lodge a formal complaint or are unable to do so.

Some fear imprisonment and go into hiding after being returned; they may receive medical treatment only long after the fact, making documenting evidence of their injuries problematic.

Muchuma said RLP is still in discussions about how best to help clients who want to pursue legal redress. “There are questions about jurisdiction that need to be determined, among others.”

She added, “The use of excessive force is across the board, but many of our clients are from the UK.”

Wild foods could combat hunger



NAIROBI, April 2013 (IRIN) – Malnutrition could be greatly reduced and food security improved by ensuring improved access to nutrient-rich forest-derived foods like berries, bushmeat, roots, insects and nuts for the world's poorest populations, experts say.

"I believe forest foods are particularly important for reducing malnutrition when it comes to micronutrients such as vitamin A and iron," Bronwen Powell, a nutritionist and researcher at the Centre for International Research on Forests (CIFOR), told IRIN.

Making these foods accessible would mean bringing them to markets to benefit the urban poor, many of whom find imported fruits and processed foods unaffordable, and giving people legal access to forests to obtain bio-resources like game meat and honey in areas where it is illegal to do so.

Nutrient potential

Experts told IRIN that while forest foods are underused, they could prove more affordable and more acceptable than other food options.

"With food becoming scarcer, there are calls for communities to look for alternative food sources and foods – some of which might not be readily acceptable to them – but wild foods and fruits have been a delicacy for generations and would be readily acceptable to many people," said Enoch Mwani, an agricultural economist at the University of Nairobi.

In its 2011 Forests for Improved Food Security and Nutrition report, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) noted that households living on the margins of poverty could, during the "lean season" or in times of famine or food shortage, rely on forests to provide "an important safety net."

Others, like Monica Ayieko, a family and consumer economist and an edible insect researcher at Maseno University, say more efforts are needed to change

people's perceptions about wild foods.

"The Westernization of diets has made people associate wild foods like edible insects – a vital source of amino acids and minerals – with poverty. It is a pity because so many children die as a result of nutrient deficiency, yet these are abundant in wild foods," Ayieko noted.

Studies have recently suggested that insects are a better source of protein as they produce less greenhouse gases than cattle and pigs.

"We must broaden the use of wild foods like wild insects, like crickets, in poor people's diets, and the good news is FAO has begun to take [the] lead on this," she added.

Globally, an estimated 1.6 billion people rely on forests for their livelihoods, according to FAO.

Some 870 million people globally are food insecure, while a further 2 billion suffer from nutrient deficiencies.

In Tanzania, a 2011 study of 270 children and their mothers, conducted by CIFOR, revealed that children who consumed wild fruits from forests were more likely to have more diverse and nutritious diets.

The wild foods contributed over 30 percent of the vitamin A and almost 20 percent of the iron that the children consumed each day, even though the foods accounted for just two percent of their diets.

Another study in Madagascar revealed that 30 percent more children would suffer from anemia if they had no access to bushmeat. And studies in the Congo Basin show that bushmeat accounts for 80 percent of the proteins and fats consumed by the local communities.

Increased investment in forest development by governments and organizations, increased local control over forest management and use, pro-poor forestry measures, and the integration of forests into national food security strategies are some of the ways to boost access to forest-derived foods.

Nepal turns to renewable energy

KATHMANDU, April 2013 (IRIN) – Nepal's recently adopted policy of subsidizing renewable energy is the latest of many attempts to electrify long-deprived areas, but much more is needed, say experts.

More than half of the country's households – almost all in urban and semi-urban areas – are connected to the national electricity grid. But 80 percent of the population is rural, and in these areas, less than one-third have electricity. With grid extension to the country's hilly and mountainous areas prohibitively expensive, officials are looking to off-grid renewable alternatives.

"Renewable, off-grid energy solutions [are] the only realistic way to provide energy in parts of the country," according to the government's National Rural and Renewable Energy Programme (NRREP), a five-year framework launched in 2012.

The new policy funds technologies sourced from hydropower, solar, biogas (a mixture of methane and carbon dioxide produced by fermenting organic matter) and – for the first time – wind. The policy also seeks to use biomass, a traditional energy source, more efficiently.

Untapped energy

Despite Nepal's potential wealth in solar energy and hydropower (the highest after Brazil) and three decades of research, development of these energies has not kept pace with population growth.

The little renewable energy that has been harnessed is poorly distributed due to crumbling infrastructure incapable of delivering, for example, parts for wind turbines.


Such technology is almost entirely absent in the most inaccessible and deprived regions, like the country's western Karnali Zone, where over 80 percent of the 400,000 residents have moderate or serious problems getting enough food. More than 42 percent of people there live below the poverty line, and more than 60 percent of under-five children are too short for their age, a measure of chronic under-nutrition.

A 2011 study described how renewable energy can improve education by extending study hours; enable life-saving communication; facilitate delivery of chilled medication and vaccines; boost yields in agriculture-dependent economies where farmers still largely rely on manual tilling; and even boost rural incomes through cottage industries like poultry farms.

THE GOAT PROBLEM

A First-Hand Account of Volunteering in Nicaragua

By DIEGO CUPOLO
Text & Photos



The children in a Nicaraguan mountaintop village were suffering from malnutrition so a Canadian couple pitched in and bought them some goats. They hoped the animals would provide milk, meat, and plenty of manure for the fields. It seemed like the perfect solution.

There was only one problem: the goats devoured the community's main cash crop: coffee. Sure, the kids were getting their milk, but not so much of anything else.

This was the situation when Alice and I arrived in Comunidad del Volcán, home to some of the poorest families in northern Nicaragua. It was a 90-minute walk uphill from the closet road and an hour from the closest store, sometimes making the simple process of buying salt turn into a day-long excursion.

We were there to help build a corral that would contain the goats and to teach English in the community school. It was part of a loose volunteer opportunity offered to us by a public health worker in the nearby city of Somoto. Throughout the stay, Alice and I would be adopted by the Pineda family and experienced first-hand the challenges faced by rural Nicaraguans, all while enduring long bouts of painful indigestion – both physical and mental.

Doña Maria, Hitlercito and the Pineda Family

We arrived at the Pineda family property with bag loads of fresh vegetables a after long, exhausting uphill hike. Right away, we were surrounded by a group of young boys, each one tugging at our shirts, and a pack of dogs so underfed their ribs stuck out of their

sides.

A short, older woman with tense shoulders came out to greet us. Her name was Doña Maria and she was not only the oldest member of the community, but also the mother, aunt, sister and grandmother of many of the people we would meet during our stay.

Doña Maria showed us the bed we would be using and then gave us a quick tour of her family's mountaintop property, which she described as the worst parcel of her father's original farm land.

The Pineda family lived so close to the Honduran border, she explained, that they had to move away during the 1980s Contra Wars to escape the heavy fighting and violence in the area. When she returned in the mid-1990s, most of her land had been occupied by other families through the Sandinista government's antipoverty campaigns.

"The soil here is very bad," she said. "Not much can grow in it and we have many landslides during the rain seasons, but where else can we go?"

Then, she called us to lunch. Over a plate of rice and beans, locally known as "Gallo Pinto," Ania and I met the rest of the family.

I asked how Hitler got his name and Doña Maria responded: "I don't know when or where, but I heard that name somewhere and thought it had a beautiful sound."

Doña María lived with three of her sons, Jenir, Angel and Hitler, and her only daughter, Haslen – her other two sons lived in the capital, Managua.

I asked how Hitler got his name and Doña Maria responded: "I don't know when or where, but I heard that name somewhere and thought it had a beautiful sound."

Twenty-three years later, Hitler had a son and named him Hitlercito. Hitlercito, a six year old boy, ran around us with his friends as we ate. His father explained that an international team of volunteers had recently built a school for the community, but they lacked teachers. Also, since they were coffee farmers and didn't grow many fruits or vegetables the Pineda family often lacked money and food.

With an empty plate in his hands, Hitler said they ate rice and beans three times a day when they could. Sometimes they had soup, but this was only the brown water leftover from cooking the beans. Looking down at the ground, he said when the times got really rough, the family often ate stray dogs.



"Looking down at the ground, he said when the times got really rough, the family often ate stray dogs"

Campesino Mornings, Professor Afternoons

The stories floated in the thin mountain air, sometimes weighing me down like the 40-kilo sacks of goat manure I had to carry through the coffee fields first thing every morning. The work, like all farm work, was demanding. Alice and I were outside all day, sweating side by side with campesinos, occasionally taking breaks to gaze into the valleys below.

The first few days centered around the goat problem. We helped the farmers build a barbed wire corral to keep the goats in a controlled area away from the coffee fields. We spent most of the time

looking for gaps in the fence, patching holes, and digging holes while talking about life in the mountains and, of course, the goats.

For the Pineda family, their future was the goats. The horned beasts occupied their days, sunrise to sunset and if they could manage the animals correctly, they would be able to improve their economic prospects and the health of their children.

In the afternoons, Alice and I gave English classes in the school house, a small cement structure with rows of new wooden tables and a whiteboard. We had five or six students ranging from 8 to 30 years old and we taught them practical sentences, farm vocabulary and even

basic geography.

It was my first time teaching English and the word "Thursday" presented special problems.

"Chursday?" one student said.

"No, Fursday," another responded.

Try explaining it to a non-English speaker some time.

Regardless of our efforts, the work was often interrupted by unexpected problems. During our short stay in Comunidad del Volcán, the family's water supply was cut off three times by heavy rains, leading to long delays as Jenir and Angel repaired the pipeline.



We spent most of the time looking for gaps in the fence, patching holes, and digging holes while talking about life in the mountains and, of course, the goats.



One afternoon, a community member died in a bus accident and we passed the next three days in mourning and organizing funeral proceedings.

In a memorable instance, a troubled family relative came to the community looking for a place to hide.

Apparently, he had beaten his pregnant girlfriend until she lost consciousness and the police was after him.

Disgusted, Doña Maria turned him away, saying he should turn himself in, but at the same time, she felt bad for the boy, who was only 16 years old.

"His mother had twelve different kids with twelve different men," she said. "He came from a broken family so you can't blame him."

Sustainability and Self-Sufficiency

After a week in Comunidad del Volcán, Alice and I noticed two things: 1.) Our digestion had stopped and 2.)

After years of working with international volunteers, the community members had developed an unhealthy reliance on foreign aid.

They, the farmers, seemed to think we, the city dwellers, could solve all their rural problems. We were put in a position where they viewed our limited knowledge as more valuable than their own, even though they grew up working with the land. Caught off guard, Alice and I took the opportunity to lead them a little closer to self-sufficiency.

We figured they needed a sense of

independence, a sense of pride and confidence, so we taught the girls how to make jewelry and handcrafts to sell in the local markets and we helped the community plant a sustainable vegetable garden, showing them how to place onion seedlings to naturally repel insects and fungi.

In the end, we realized our most valuable contributions were ideas and creativity, not money or gifts which are often squandered.

Leaving Comunidad del Volcán

Our last day in Comunidad del Volcán, we installed a barbed wire door on the corral and goats' new home was finished. The entire Pineda family came out to watch as Jenir, Angel, Hitler, Alice and I led the animals into their fresh pasture grounds. It may seem small for outsiders, but it was a big accomplishment.

Not only would the coffee plants be safe from the ravaging beasts, but five goats were due to give birth in the next month which meant five times more milk for the children. Hitlercito and his friends would grow up strong.

The goat problem had been resolved and the time had arrived for Alice and I to move on. We would have liked to stay longer in the Comunidad del Volcán, but our stomachs wouldn't allow it. We were simply unaccustomed to the Gallo Pinto diet and their heavy use of soy oil.

"They seemed to think we, the city dwellers, could solve all their rural problems. We were put in a position where they viewed our limited knowledge as more valuable than their own, even though they grew up working with the land."



That afternoon, Alice and I cooked a big feast of Venezuelan arepas for everyone and Jenir taught me how to cut wood with a chainsaw. It was his way of saying thanks. Then we said our goodbyes and went back down the mountain to places with roads where salt was readily available.

To this day, I look back at the experience and think about the Pineda family often. Rice and beans every meal, a hole in the ground for a toilet, cold soup bowl showers, and nightly discussions around the warm clay stove. Up there in the mountain, we experienced

the everyday problems and limits of rural poverty in Nicaragua – and much of the world – we didn't just read about them as theories in textbooks.

Volunteer Opportunity

Comunidad del Volcán is always looking for more help. Interested volunteers can contact community resident Aslen at phaslen@yahoo.com or a local volunteer coordinator Marie-Claude Ricard at folie123@hotmail.com. Allow at least a week for them to respond. Comunidad del Volcán is located north of Ocotal near a town called Dipilto Viejo

(just south of the the Honduras border. It's not easy to find, but a family member can meet you at the Ocotal bus station once an arrival date is established and lead you to the community.

Diego Cupolo (www.diegocupolo.com) is a freelance photojournalist, born to Italian parents in Mexico City and has lived in Caracas, New York City, Montreal, and Buenos Aires. His work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The Star-Ledger*, *UpsideDownWorld.org*, and *Discover Magazine*.



To this day, I look back at the experience and think about the Pineda family often. Rice and beans every meal, a hole in the ground for a toilet, cold soup bowl showers, and nightly discussions around the warm clay stove.



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Can we avoid another children's crisis in the Sahel? -23



Child Soldiers in the World



- The number of children under the age of 18 who have been coerced or induced to take up arms as child soldiers is generally thought to be in the range of 300,000.

- Most soldiers under 15 are to be found in non-governmental military organizations.

- Most child soldiers under 18 have been recruited into Governmental armed forces.

- The youngest child soldiers are about 7 years old.

- Over 50 countries currently recruit children under age 18 into their armed forces.

Children in armed conflicts (1990s)

2 million killed;
4 –5 million disabled;
12 million left homeless;
1 million orphaned or separated from their parents;
10 million psychologically traumatized
Source: UNICEF.

Under international law, the participation of children under 18 in armed conflict is generally prohibited, and the recruitment and use of children under 15 is a war crime. Yet worldwide, hundreds of thousands of children are recruited into government armed forces, paramilitaries, civil militia and a variety of other armed groups. Often they are abducted at school, on the streets or at home. Others enlist "voluntarily", usually because they see few alternatives. Such children are robbed of their childhood and exposed to terrible dangers and to psychological and physical suffering. They are placed in combat situations, used as spies, messengers, porters, servants or to lay or clear landmines. Girls in particular are at risk of rape and sexual abuse.

P. W. Singer of the Brookings Institution estimated in January 2003 that child soldiers participate in about three quarters of all the ongoing conflicts in the world. According to the website of Human Rights Watch as of July 2007: 'In over twenty countries around the world, children are direct participants in war. Denied a childhood and often subjected to horrific violence, an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 children are serving as soldiers for both rebel groups and government forces in current armed conflicts.'

Under the terms of Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions, children over the age of fifteen who have volunteered can be used as spotters, observers, and message-carriers. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) has stated that most children serving as soldiers are over fifteen, although many exist at far younger ages.

The internationally agreed definition for a child associated with an armed force or armed group (child soldier) is any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters,

cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities. (Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, 2007.

Since 2000, the participation of child soldiers has been reported in most armed conflicts and in almost every region of the world. Although there are no exact figures, and numbers continually change, tens of thousands of children under the age of 18 continue to serve in government forces or armed opposition groups. Some of those involved in armed conflict are under 10 years old.

Both girls and boys are used in armed conflict and play a wide variety of roles. These can involve frontline duties including as fighters but they may also be used in other roles such as porters, couriers, spies, guards, suicide bombers or human shields, or to perform domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning. Girls and boys may also be used for sexual purposes by armed forces or groups.

Many children that participate in armed conflict are unlawfully recruited, either by force or at an age below that which is permitted in national law or international standards. Although international standards do not prohibit the voluntary recruitment of 16 and 17 year olds by armed forces, it is contrary to best practice. Today close to two thirds of states recognise that banning under-18s from military

ranks is necessary to protect them from the risk of involvement in armed conflict and to ensure their well-being, and that their other rights as children are respected.



What do children play in the Colombian conflict?



By **LAURA D. ORTIZ**

According to the Happy Planet Index in 2012, Colombia is positioned as the 3rd happiest country in the world. The HPI results, that consider this country among other nations as Costa Rica and Vietnam, are based on three main components: experienced well-being, life expectancy and ecological footprint. But, how come one of the happiest countries in the world is still facing a civil war? And how the experienced well-being is so high, in a

between the forces and military actions are still a reality. In Colombia, the transitional justice process has been developed before the conflict is over.

In August 2012, under the President Juan Manuel Santos Administration, Colombia started for the 3rd time, a Peace Process between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The conversations between the guerrilla group and the state, held in

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"at the beginning of 2012, more than 14.000 children were involved in the Colombian conflict as members of the armed forces"



country where human rights abuses are so common?

The armed conflict in Colombia represents nowadays a grey area where many have things to say and just a few of those things are actually relevant. In fact, to start talking about what is really happening in this South American nation, it is important to say that even if there are on-going peace processes and demobilizations of different insurgency groups, battles

Norway and Cuba, have produced different reactions among the civil society, most of them positive and optimistic about the country's future.

Nevertheless, the Colombian civil conflict involves more actors and enemies than those present in the negotiations. Guerrilla groups (FARC being just one of them), paramilitaries, security forces and bacrim –emergent bands closely related to the drug trafficking– continue to be

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responsible for crimes under international law, including massacres, abductions, enforced disappearances, and forced displacement.

As in many other countries, children have had an important role in war. They have not only been enrolled as soldiers in a conflict that started way before they were born, but they have also been used as messengers, intelligent forces and sex slaves, among others. According to different NGOs worldwide, at the beginning of 2012, more than 14,000 children were involved in the Colombian conflict as members of the armed forces. But, what is the reality of child soldiers in Colombia nowadays? How is the country addressing the problem? And which challenges will it have to face?



Children employed by different forces

Children are being employed in the Colombian conflict by all the different armed forces. They are not only being recruited by the guerrilla groups, but also by the paramilitary forces and the state agents. Child soldiers are enrolled as combatants, messengers and spies; some of them are actually being used for the discovery of anti-personnel mines and even in the drug business which is closely related to the armed conflict in Colombia. The 2012 report by the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF) and an investigation conducted by El Tiempo, the biggest national newspaper, shows that “at least 100,000 children and teenagers are related to different sectors of the illegal economy, directly controlled by insurgents and criminal organizations”.

As soldiers, children and adolescents are forced to take up arms and face the enemy. After being militarily trained, they participate in armed clashes and massacres. They become members of the insurgency with the same amount of duties as adults, but with a restricted amount of rights among the forces. In this way, they grow in a warlike atmosphere, knowing conflict as their only way to survive.

As messengers and spies, child soldiers are used by all the different forces to pass information among the troops, and to gather intelligence details from the enemy. Children are used mainly as messengers and spies, due to their ability to pass unnoticed. They are recruited not only by the guerrilla groups, the paramilitaries and bacrim, but also by the national security forces. In fact, one of the biggest critiques to the Colombian Armed Forces is the use of children as informants during the civil conflict. As was mentioned in 2012 by the NGO Colombian Coalition Against the Involvement of Children and Youth in Armed Conflict, the army pledged not to recruit child soldiers, but is still calling them to inform them about the armed groups and

the drug business.

Human rights abuse against children and youth, and their use as elements of war, characterizes a dark era of the ongoing conflict. The use of minors as instruments of war is a despicable, but a widely used technique practiced in many conflicts occurring in different parts of the world. At

this point, the Colombian example becomes relevant, since it recognizes the threats that it carries and the visibility of the problem. As the ICBF Report shows, during the ongoing peace process and demobilization-recruitment of child soldiers in urban areas is 17 times more common than four years ago.

Violence against girls

“Death penalty against the guerrilla bitches of the FARC who are opposing the policies of our government” (Black Eagles Capital Bloc, a group of paramilitary forces active in urban areas, sent this statement via email to a number of NGOs on 19 June, 2011.)

The role of girls in this civil war has been wide and difficult to address. They have not only been used as members of the military forces, but they have also become sexual slaves and support staff. In some cases, women are separated from their families and held hostages before they turned 18, and then became maids and servants of insurgents. In others, they join the forces as soldiers and fight against the enemies as men do.

In the first case, girls grow in an environment where their education is being denied and their role is limited to the subsistence economy of the armed forces. In this way, even inside the guerrilla and paramilitary groups, equity and egalitarian participation is limited by the superior role of men. As Arturo Escobar said, “women have been the ‘invisible peasants’ or, to be more precise, visibility of women has been organized through techniques that consider only their role as reproductive individuals”. In the second case, women are trained as members of the armed groups, forced to hold guns and to fight in the front line, among other members of guerrilla and paramilitary groups. In this way, girls become perpetrators and victims at the same time; an important element to take into account since the amount of women used by the armed forces has been

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increasing over the years. As the Report done by the ICBF says, 47% of the minors recruited in Colombia are girls.

But they are also separated from their families to become sexual slaves, as part of the exploitation of children in the Colombian armed conflict. As the 2012 Annual Report of the NGO International Tribunal over the Children affected by War and Poverty shows, armed groups use girls as “girlfriends”, they rape them, force them to have miscarriages, to become prostitutes, to be mutilated sexually, and to become slaves. All these atrocities undermine the role of women in society and interfere nowadays with the reconstruction, reparation and reintegration processes in the country.

In a different scenario, rapes of under-aged women and the use of girls as sex slaves have become, for some tribes in Colombia, a kind of genocide that is difficult to address and represents a threat to the country’s multidiversity. Abductions, disappearances and displacements are also threatening the survival of minorities in the country, as they represent a menace to vulnerable groups.

In fact, human rights violations against minority girls are considered as one of the biggest challenges in Colombia, as menaces against these populations are double. As is mentioned by Muñoz Vargas in 2005, “in Colombia, violence against indigenous and Afro descendant girls, for gender related reasons, has worsened the situation of minorities, making them the main victims of forced displacement and the subject of racial discrimination and vulnerability”. All and all, it can be said that the role of girls in the Colombian conflict is difficult to address and represents a major challenge to the current Administration. Not only policies of reintegration are enough, initiatives for gender equality and human rights protection are a must. Furthermore, it is necessary to start a cultural change that addresses the role of girls and women in society, in order to assure a kind of social development that “meets the needs of the

present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (BRUNDTLAND REPORT, 1987).

The challenges of reintegration

In June 2011 the Victims Law was launched by Juan Manuel Santos Administration, as part of the transitional process that Colombia is currently facing. The document



took into account the role of children in the armed conflict and evaluated their position as victims and perpetrators. Article 3 of the document says: “Members of the illegal armed groups will not be considered as victims, except in cases of children or adolescents that have been unassociated from the organized armed forces, while they were still underage”.

In this way, insurgent children and adolescents were considered as victims of the civil war, and not only as perpetrators. The absolutions of crimes and the reintegration of these child soldiers represent an important step in order to protect them from a conflict that started before they were born. Nevertheless, the Law has also demonstrated to be insufficient and too wide. Besides, the uncertainties about the future and the profitability of the drug business have hindered children out of war.

On the other hand, the paramilitary forces started a process of demobilization in

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2005, with a particular legal context that took into account both adults and children. In fact, the Colombian government, through the High Council for Reintegration, counted circa 4,400 children separated from the illegal armed groups. The main challenge with them was the fact that, some of these children could not be treated as victims, since they started as child soldiers, but were already adults when demobilization took place. In this way, the gaps in national and international law have become an important issue that affects them directly.

A boy that was abducted while he was underage; was trained and forced to fight against the enemy, and then became an adult, is not considered by the Colombian laws, or the International treaties, as a victim. But, was it really his choice to become a perpetrator? If children grow in an environment of war, they are educated in a game of blacks and whites, and they only get to know this reality, culpability and collective guilt should be considered from a wider perspective.

Yet, the problem is even more complex. Some paramilitary forces frustrated by the lack of results of the demobilization process and seduced by the drug business, evolved and became the emergent criminal bands, known today as bacrim. These new and growing forces keep enrolling minors among their lines – some of them ex-members of paramilitary groups– and forced them to fight against the state agents. An even bigger legal limbo is developed in this scenario, where child soldiers of bacrim are considered criminals and cannot be treated as victims, denying them the government's protection and the possibility to participate in any reintegration program. If a country is unable to offer a guarantee to its population and fails to promote a healthy environment for the development of childhood, the way individuals are separated into victims and perpetrators should be reconsidered. As many actors and causes the Colombian armed conflict involves, many perspectives should be taken into account in order to face the future. A transitional process cannot be started



without understanding completely the reality of the country.

Transitional process in Colombia

The appearance of insurgency, organized crimes and new military practices have become of great importance for the political and social debates regarding the new elements that should be taken into account during the transitional justice processes worldwide.

Until now, integral reparation has involved five main issues: the restitution of land and goods, the rehabilitation of victims, satisfaction in terms of symbolic and moral reparation, search of non-repetition guarantees, and the compensation of victims. The Colombian transitional process has tried to address all of these elements through different initiatives as the Victims and Land Restitution Law, providing reparations for some survivors of human right abuses, including those perpetrated by state agents.

In the case of child soldiers, the initiative "Mambrú no fue a la Guerra" offers recreational and cultural space for boys and girls in the most dangerous zones of Colombia, in an attempt to avoid their involvement in the armed conflict. This program, launched in July 2011, supports different projects all around the rural and urban areas of the country, in order to create incentives for kids not to join the forces. Regardless, the initiative has demonstrated to be useful, even though it does not address abductions or the involuntary enrollment of children. As was said before, the Colombian armed conflict is far more complicated than a game of cops and robbers. The elements that should be taken into account while analyzing the problem are wider and involve more perspectives than those that are being used nowadays. In this way, the transitional process has many more challenges to address than those that are currently being studied, particularly in the case of child soldiers. Still, the questions remain the same, who is to blame? Who should be judged? And which challenges will Colombia have to face?

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"Some paramilitary forces frustrated by the lack of results of the demobilization process and seduced by the drug business, evolved and became the emergent criminal bands, known today as bacrim"

Child Soldiers International is an international human rights research and advocacy

organisation. CSI seeks to end the military recruitment and the use in hostilities, in any capacity, of any person under the age of 18 by state armed forces or non-state armed groups. The organization advocates for the release of unlawfully recruited children, promote their successful reintegration into civilian life, and call for accountability for those who unlawfully recruit or use them.

CSI works to end the military recruitment of under-18s globally and to prevent their use in armed conflict



wherever it occurs. CSI does this through global monitoring, in-depth work on selected countries, and research and analysis on



key thematic issues relating to child soldiers.

Failed states, child soldiers and bloody wars



By HRIDAY SHARMA
Correspondent, South-South
Development Cooperation

For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. Children have the most innocent minds; any idea inculcated to a child will resonate in his/ her mind throughout lifetime. This applies to every child living anywhere in the world. However, it is a known fact that the Third World is still not a safe place to live, though a majority of the world population live in the developing world. It is only recently the Third World emerged out of a long epoch of colonial bigotry and has thereafter immediately got embroiled in whirlpools of violent internal or regional clashes. Very few newly independent states have been fortunate enough to escape the aforementioned trend. Those states that did escape such major clashes are presently treading resolutely on the path of development.

However those states that soon after their independence witnessed gory internal or regional clashes on ethnic, sectarian or religious lines are now heading in the direction of functional collapse. Depending on the degree of bloodshed and overt turmoil these states can be categorized as 'failed states' (like Somalia and the DR Congo), 'states on the verge of state-failure' (like Afghanistan, Haiti etc.) and 'states progressing on the path of failure' (like Uganda, Liberia, etc.). However a common phenomenon that is present in all these territories is that the belligerent parties use child soldiers as pawns in the prevailing gory wars!

This article equates child soldiers as the 'children of men' because under the present (violent) global circumstances the birth of every child is a matter of glory for mankind. The potential contribution



of every child to the present globalized human civilization on the only human-life sustaining planet, i.e. earth, is immensely valuable. On the contrary, rouge elements across the world (like terrorist organizations, terror propagating governments etc.) are either forcefully, deceitfully or persuasively arming the children of their respective domiciling regions to fight bloody wars.

Over the past years, the UN has persistently continued with its efforts of bringing an end to the recruitment of child soldiers, decommissioning of active child soldiers and their re-integration into the mainstream society, which it still continues today and will do so even in the future. However, the fact that even today there are around 25,000 children around the globe who are shouldering the duty to kill makes it explicit that the UN has lagged miles behind achieving its previously set goals. In the meantime, different non-governmental organizations from across the world are playing a very crucial role in practically addressing the issue of child soldiers. Following are briefly discussed few NGOs that are dedicatedly working to emancipate child soldiers caught-up at the line of fire in the Third World.

The forerunner of all such NGOs is 'Child Soldiers International', previously known as the Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers, that was founded in 1998 by a coalition of leading international human rights and humanitarian organisations. Today the organization is extensively carrying out on the ground activities in 5 states, which it considers as the world's most priority states, namely Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Thailand and Britain. Save the last country, which is one of the 20 states

in the world that have a minimum voluntary recruitment age of 16 years to be recruited into its national armed forces, the rest of the four countries are war-torn nations where the legitimacy of the institutions of the state, including national governments, is not internally and externally confirmed. Its activities include making critical and authentic reports on non-state belligerent parties (extremist organizations, secessionist movements etc) and states that are engaging children to fight wars, assisting the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to monitor implementation of Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC), etc.

CSI has national and regional partners, like the Australian Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and the Southeast Asia Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. Both of these partner organizations have been working within their geographic areas with their limited resources. Also, there are also other well-known and not so well-known NGOs like Peace Direct, Amnesty International, World Vision, Kindernothilfe and so forth that consider the issue of child soldiers as a 'priority area of work' in their wide-ranging conflict resolution activities. Interestingly, one common thing about all these NGOs is that they take up a seemingly reticent approach to carry on their activities for securing the future of the innocent but misled child soldiers from across the world.

It remains to be seen in the future-will NGOs' initiatives be able to positively mould the destiny of thousands of child soldiers that are recruited to kill and to be killed.

Democratic Republic of Congo: school, the best deterrent against the recruitment of minors

Goma, February 2013 – For anyone who travels along the muddy and rugged roads of the eastern province of North Kivu, teenage boys clasp on to rifles or some other type of firearm is commonplace. Children are frequently the victims of forced recruitment in the ranks of one of the many armed groups in Congo. Other times, they join rebel groups as they believe it to be the only viable prospect for the future.

To mark Red Hand Day, dedicated to the plight of child soldiers in countries of conflict, commemorated annually on 12 February, the Jesuit Refugee Service in Great Lakes Africa highlighted the importance of education and access to school as a priority instrument in preventing the entry of minors into rebel groups. In addition, JRS reiterated its appeal to the Congolese authorities to protect minors from all forms of exploitation by the military.

JRS staff in North Kivu, an area in which more than 900,000 displaced persons live with ongoing insecurity, have witnessed the benefits that education, offering hope of a better future to displaced children and adolescents. Moreover, education is fundamental so that tomorrow's adults do not take up arms and instead become future leaders dedicated to peace building and development of the country.

"We have noticed that the boys who voluntarily join armed groups are those who don't attend school. Therefore, it's important that there are more schools and educated young people in North Kivu. We teach them about tolerance and

respect so that tomorrow they become peace builders in Congo", explained Esperance Nsengimana, teacher in Kanyangohe secondary school, built by JRS in 2012.

Education instils hope. Claude Wiringye just turned 18 years of age but has lived in a camp for displaced persons since he was 10. He currently lives in Mweso camp with his mother and younger siblings where he is enrolled in his final year of school.

"Life in the camp is very difficult, particularly when trying to find something to eat because we don't have any land to grow anything. Fortunately I go to school and I know that this will help me in the future", said Claude.

Claude is very clear about his future goals: pass the final year exams and become a psychology teacher.

"This way I'll have a job and be able to help my family. On the other hand, with a background in psychology I'll be able to make myself useful to the community by teaching others mutual respect to help people to live in peace. Going to school has given me back hope", Claude added.

Going to school in war zones. For displaced children, acquiring an education is anything but taken for granted. Having lost the only income they possessed, land, most parents are not able to pay school fees to send their children to school, not to talk about paying for uniforms and books. For this reason, when JRS builds a school, headmasters in the community do their best to accept as many displaced children



"Children are frequently the victims of forced recruitment in the ranks of one of the many armed groups in Congo"

as possible. JRS built four schools in the Mweso area in 2012.

Ongoing violence by rebel groups still represents the greatest obstacle for children trying to access education. Following the military incursion into the provincial capital, Goma, by the March 23 Movement (M23) late last November more than 240,000 children missed school for several weeks.

Forced recruitment. While schools are a major preventative force in keeping children away from rebel groups, it is also the responsibility of the Congolese authorities to protect children from forced recruitment.

Last September, JRS was one of the signatories of a press statement urging the Congolese government to guarantee protection to children against forced recruitment. According to Human Rights Watch, from May to September 2012, at least 48 children were recruited by M23 rebels.

In October, the national government and the UN agreed on an action plan for the protection of children against forced recruitment and other human rights violations at the hands of armed groups or the military.

During the recent crisis in Goma, however, UN agencies and NGOs condemned the systematic human rights violations by state and armed group, including "killings, kidnappings, torture and destruction of private property", in which adolescents were also involved. (text by Danilo Giannese, JRS Great Lakes Africa



SRI LANKA: Former Child Soldiers Struggle for a Normal Life



Cheran was 15 when he was abducted into the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). He ran away two years later in January 2009.

"Being with the LTTE was a disaster. I never believed or cared for their cause, and don't like violence in general, but I feel that I might be seen as a terrorist or a violent person by others. This thought is very depressing."

Since the Sri Lankan government declared victory against the LTTE, former child soldiers like Cheran have returned home, but many still face problems reintegrating and are fighting another battle – to overcome psychological scars and regain acceptance into society.

According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), 6,903 children are known to have been recruited by the LTTE between 2002 and 2007.

Since the 1980s, the Tamil Tigers used children – many of them forcibly conscripted – as scouts and sentries, and in the 1990s, also for combat, said Brig. Sudantha Ranasinghe, director-general of the government department mandated to rehabilitate former child soldiers.

When the conflict ended in May 2009, the government helped reintegrate the children into society by giving them counselling and vocational training, and helping them to enrol in school. In April, the government closed its last remaining rehabilitation centre for former child soldiers in the northern town of Vavuniya.

According to UNICEF, 588 children have been reunited with their families while nine children remain in children's

homes and a further 54 children have been returned to school hostels for their education. The government and UN children's agency are working on establishing community-based reintegration to meet the needs of all children.

"Children are always victims of war and are never perpetrators. Society now has a duty of fully reintegrating these children without any discrimination," said Hemamal Jayawardena, a legal protection specialist who has worked with former child soldiers.

"If we fail to trust them, if we treat them differently or act in an irresponsible manner, we could create a situation where their pasts could begin to haunt their minds again. Then all the good work of the rehabilitation process could be in vain," he said.

Resilience

Children have remarkable coping mechanisms and can even block out the "shattering psychological trauma" they've suffered, Jayawardena said.

"The seemingly normal life ex-combatant children are now going through shows their resilience and the great ability of children to cope and adapt," he said. "With time, most have been able to forget and put into their past the terrifying experiences they went through during recruitment, training, carrying lethal weapons, and even engaging in war."

Nonetheless, the trauma of life at war – when no one is paying attention to a

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child's needs – has serious repercussions on a child's psychological growth.

"Child soldiers live in environments that are the complete opposite from a normal child's living environment," said Mahesan Ganeshan, a psychiatrist who works with trauma-affected children in eastern Sri Lanka. "Being a child soldier distorts a child's view. Their expectations about everything change."

Many former child soldiers lack confidence, and therefore struggle with relationships and trust. They also have problems with anger management, he said.

Such issues pose a challenge for their reintegration with their families, schools and communities. "It's hard for them to make friends and spend spare time together because of their former association with armed groups," said Win Ma Ma Aye, the head of child protection for Save the Children in Sri Lanka.

When there is a security-related incident, "people often suspect the involvement of former child soldiers which deters them from starting afresh", she said, adding that they also have a hard time finding jobs. "All of these lead to more stress and often result in more aggressive and/or depressive behavior,"



Win Ma Ma Aye said.

"I wished I had died"

Susila, the youngest child of a family of four, was 15 when she was forcibly recruited by the LTTE in 2001. She was beaten and eventually forced into battle. She ran away from the LTTE six years later.

Now 24, Susila is unemployed, surviving with help from her family in Kokkadicholai Village, Batticaloa District. She tries hard not to think about the war.

"I thought I would die, especially after 2006 when fighting became really bad," she said. "Sometimes I wished I had simply died in fighting. The worst was the fear of pending death, rather than death itself." (Source IRIN)

"Being a child soldier distorts a child's view. Their expectations about everything change"

"Many former child soldiers lack confidence, and therefore struggle with relationships and trust. They also have problems with anger management"

Ex-child-soldier: 'Shooting became just like drinking a glass of water'

As a teenager in war-ravaged Sierra Leone, Ishmael Beah was brainwashed, drugged and forced to kill.

"We went from children who were afraid of gunshots to now children who were gunshots," says Beah who became separated from his family at just 12 years old when his town was attacked. He says his family were later killed in the country's vicious civil war, which lasted from 1991 to 2002.

During this period rebel groups like the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) -- who were notorious for hacking off limbs and indoctrinating children into their struggle -- fought government forces and their offshoots for control of the diamond rich West African state. Desperate for help, Beah says he wandered the countryside with a group of other children who had lost their families in similar circumstances. They managed to avoid the roaming RUF rebels but witnessed gunfights, ransacked villages and countless dead bodies along the way.

"I saw a man carrying his son that had been shot dead, but he was trying to run with him to the hospital," Beah recalls.

"(There was also) this woman had

been running and she had a baby that was tied on her back. She'd been running away from the fighting and the bullet had struck the baby and the baby had been killed but she didn't know."

Eventually Beah and his friends came across a rural camp they initially believed to be an army base.

They soon realized however that they had in fact stumbled upon a battalion of breakaway Sierra Leonean soldiers. The splinter group opposed the RUF but were pursuing similarly vicious fighting tactics, including the deployment of child soldiers. Beah was taken in, given shelter and eventually trained to kill.

"Somebody being shot in front of you, or you yourself shooting somebody became just like drinking a glass of water. Children who refused to fight, kill or showed any weakness were ruthlessly dealt with.

"Emotions weren't allowed," he continued. "For example a nine-year-old boy cried because they missed their mother and they were shot," he says of the era which was portrayed in the 2006 Hollywood film "Blood Diamond," starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Djimon Hounsou.

Speaking about the moment he became separated from his family, Beah recalls: "I had gone to a talent show, I was interested in American hip-hop music, with my older brother, to another town and my town was attacked. I went from having an entire family to the next minute not having anything. It was very painful."

Now a U.N. goodwill ambassador, a law graduate and a best-selling author,

Beah is heading the fight to publicize the plight of child soldiers in Africa.

"I do work with UNICEF to go to some of these places, but also to meet the young people who are coming from these experiences to reassure them that it is possible to come out of this," he says. "I can speak to these children. With proper integration this is the way you can have a successful removal of children from armed groups".

Beah says he now has a greater understanding as to why children are viewed as such valuable fighting assets to groups like the RUF across Africa. According to the United Nations there remains an estimated 300,000 children involved in conflicts around the world today.

"Everybody always asks why do they go after children? Because you can easily manipulate them," he says.

"They also want to belong to something, especially if they live in a society that has collapsed completely. Their communities are broken down, they want to belong to anything slightly organized and these groups become that."

Beah felt this acceptance in his division of child soldiers and fought with the group for two years before eventually being rescued by UNICEF.

He was taken to a rehab center in the Sierra Leone capital, Freetown, where he spent eight months learning about what happened to him and readjusting to life after the war.

Those who worked at the center were frequently attacked by child soldiers finding it difficult to adapt to their new surroundings in the early days."(CNN)

Can we avoid another children's crisis in the Sahel?

"Vulnerable people and livelihoods should be protected before their lives are threatened, and not simply be assisted during times of crisis or tragedy"



DEBORA DI DIO
Special Correspondent, Food
Sovereignty and Rural Livelihoods

In 2012 a severe food and nutrition crisis affected millions of people across the Sahel Region of Western Africa. The crisis was due to a combination of drought, which sharply reduced agricultural production, high grain prices, a significant decrease in remittances, environmental degradation and population displacement coupled with chronic poverty and vulnerability. According to the United Nations, at the beginning of 2012 the number of people at risk of food insecurity in the region was as high as 18.7 million, including more than 1 million children under the age of five at risk of severe acute malnutrition.

The Sahel region of Africa is a hot, dry band of land, which starts in Senegal on the west coast and reaches as far as Chad, nearly 4,000 km to the east. Food insecurity and malnutrition are recurrent and severe, and acute food crises already occurred in 2005 and 2010; as a

consequence, many of the region's people had still not recovered when the 2012 drought struck. The region is among the poorest and most underdeveloped, with human development levels among the lowest in the world. A report issued in 2006 by the United Nations Environment Programme on climate change and vulnerability (UNEP & ICRAF 2006, Climate Change and Variability in the Sahel Region: Impacts and Adaptation Strategies in the Agricultural Sector) states that the Sahel region will be drier in the 21st century, according to most climate models, and climate change may become the greatest obstacle to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to which the Sahelian countries have subscribed.

In Mali, focus of this article, 4.6 million (32% of the population) were at risk of food and nutrition insecurity in 2012. The situation was particularly exacerbated by a fall in remittances, due

to the global economic crisis and the return of migrants from Libya. The return of migrants contributed to increase pressure on communities' scarce resources and caused tension over access to public services, such as water, health and education. The humanitarian situation, in particular for pastoralists, was of deep concern especially during the lean season (July to September), which represented the peak of the crisis. Despite upward grain production after the 2012 harvest, food prices remain high across the region, making access to food even more difficult for poor families.

Increasing challenges

The concomitance of enduring food and nutritional crisis and socio-political destabilization has led to the exponential increase of humanitarian needs, particularly with regard to food and non-food items, water, and access to basic health care. Furthermore, the

frequency and intensity of repeated crises have eroded the recovery capacity of vulnerable household, weakening their resilience and survival strategies. Prevailing insecurity continues to hinder humanitarian access, further increasing the vulnerability of men, women, and children. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the collective donor response met 60% of the food and nutrition needs in Mali in 2012, reaching 80% of the people in need of immediate food assistance. Nevertheless, many priority needs remain unmet and nutrition actors believe that in 2013, 660,000 children under 5 will suffer from acute malnutrition in Mali, including 210,000 from severe acute malnutrition (United Nations, 2013 Appel Global Mali).

Results of an emergency food security assessment conducted by the World Food Programme in 2012 demonstrate that the food security situation remains precarious in the northern regions of Mali, where most economic activities have been suspended following occupation by armed groups, and price of staples continue to increase. In such situations, poor households usually reduce the number of meals they eat per day, and adopt additional negative coping strategies such as borrowing food and money, making it even more difficult to break out of the cycle of poverty. Since mid-January 2012, the fighting between government forces and separatist rebels in Mali has forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes. At the time of writing this article, the conflict in northern Mali has displaced nearly 200,000 people, and as many individuals have fled becoming refugees in neighboring countries (OCHA, January 2013). As a result, Mali is affected by a crisis of unprecedented complexity on the political, security and humanitarian scale.

In order to prevent further deterioration and strengthen the response, the humanitarian community has launched a consolidated appeal (UN CAP 2013) to achieve four strategic objectives by the end of 2013, including the reduction of mortality and morbidity of vulnerable people, and the strengthening of resilience and livelihoods of people and communities affected by food insecurity and political crises.

Time to Act

What has the international community learned from the previous crisis in the Sahel, and the more recent Horn of Africa crisis? Food crises are triggered by a complex set of long-term and short-term factors, including the accelerated impacts of climate change on agricultural yields. Still, the world food supply maintains an overreliance on a few, high-production "bread basket" countries whose reduced production can destabilize global food prices. On the other hand, providing



farmers with improved skills and tools can produce dramatic effects especially for smallholders in developing countries, who are over-represented among the poor. Early warning for Mali (launched by FAO in October 2011) was not followed by early funding and response, which were essential to support the most vulnerable households. Unfortunately early warning and response are different, and involve different players at both institutional and operational level. As a result, while the necessary and timely information was provided, appropriate international action was delayed, multiplying risks for acutely malnourished children. Much more could have been done in Mali and in the Sahel before the lean season, to protect and rebuild the livelihoods and resilience of vulnerable households. For example, by supporting and sustaining the main planting season, promoting the conservation of natural resources, and most of all by providing integrated emergency nutrition assistance to children and women. Vulnerable people and livelihoods should be protected before their lives are threatened, and not simply be assisted during times of crisis or tragedy.

The humanitarian crisis in Mali these days demands bold action. Conflict in northern Mali is already having irreversible effects on a devastating drought and food crisis in Africa's arid Sahel region. In order to prevent further deterioration of the food security situation and avoid a full-scale food and nutrition crisis, medium and longer term interventions are critical to address structural vulnerabilities and reverse the cycle of food shortages and crises, in addition to emergency and rehabilitation activities. How much longer the children of the Sahel will have to struggle, before the international community decides to put an end to hunger and malnutrition? (The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of, and should not be attributed to, the United Nations World Food Programme in Mali or elsewhere.)

"According to the United Nations, at the beginning of 2012 the number of people at risk of food insecurity in the region was as high as 18.7 million, including more than 1 million children under the age of five at risk of severe acute malnutrition"

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Reinventing a New Model for Education in Rural Nepal

A public school in western Nepal offers a new educational model that could significantly change Nepal's primary and secondary education system

Global South Development
Magazine/ Special Field Coverage



Public schools in Nepal do not excite many as they are not renowned for quality education. Establishment of democracy in 1990 gave rise to privatization and private schools mushroomed in the country. Many Nepalis wish to send their children to private schools which are said to be expensive, but offering world class education in Nepal.

However, amidst expensive private schools and sleazy public schools there are some exceptions. Ganesh Secondary School in Narayansthan Baglung is one such exception, which being a public school surpasses the expectations that one could have from a cutting edge private school in Nepal. 'Students from private schools have joined our school in large numbers,' says Chhatranath Dhakal, Nepali teacher of the school who has been there for more than thirty years and have witnessed all the ups and downs of the school. Mr Dhakal argues that sheer willpower of the teaching staff, proactive support and enthusiastic participation of the School Management Committee and financial and moral support from non-governmental organizations, such as Social Welfare Association of Nepal

(SWAN), has given Ganesh school a new fame in western Nepal.

Ganesh School's success in the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examinations has been extraordinary. Students have passed the exams with distinction marks and overall success rate is significantly higher than in other public schools in the region. It's not only the SLC results that make Ganesh School a peculiar one. 'Our students are far more vibrant and creative if generally compared to other public or private schools in the district', claims Raju Tripathi, a teacher of Social Studies who relinquished his dream to go abroad and travelled all the way from Chitwan to Baglung, with a passion to teach underprivileged children and make a difference in rural Nepal.

Unlike in many public schools in Nepal, students at Ganesh School play with laptops since they are in primary grade. They know how to communicate in English and delivering an instant speech is not a problem. 'We have emphasized on English medium teaching because that's time's demand and that's how a world-class manpower is born,' argues Rudra Bahadur G.C. 'Milan' who

"Unlike in many public schools in Nepal, students at Ganesh School play with laptops since they are in primary grade. They know how to communicate in English and delivering an instant speech is not a problem."

"Ganesh School has been declared a 'peace-zone'. Local political forces have taken a vow and as a result there are no political strikes or 'bandh' in the school."

is known as the sturdy Mathematics teacher in the school.

'We have come a long way,' says, Surendra Acharya, a member of the school management committee and also a SWAN representative, 'nobody believed us in the beginning when we came up with this idea of an wonderful school in the Narayansthan village'. Mr Acharya believes that Ganesh School has become a brand name by now, but maintaing that name will be a challenge in the days to come. That's what he worries about frequently.

While many public schools in Nepal have been victims of regular strikes and seem to be easily accessible battlefields of political organizations, Ganesh School has been declared a 'peace-zone'. Local political forces have taken a vow and as a result there are no political strikes or 'bandh' in the school.

'Things are not perfect though,' accepts Chhatranath Dhakal, 'it would be wonderful to have a school bus, a compound wall and a clean and better organized hostel'.

The School Management Committee and the staff team is grateful to organizations that provide all possible support to them. SWAN has a School Support Program for Ganesh School and provides logistical and financial support, for instance, to build infrastructure,



Mr Chhatranath Dhakal has been in Ganesh School for more than 30 years.



acquire land and to provide scholarships for the needy and underprivileged children. 'Students that studied with SWAN's assistance have achieved remarkable success in their respective fields', claims Dhruva Shrestha, SWAN's Program Manager, 'and without SWAN's support that would have been very difficult, if not impossible', he adds.

SWAN's history of working with remote and marginalized communities in Baglung is a long one. 'It's been a long journey and our hair has turned grey,' jokes Raju Tuladhar, SWAN's Executive Director, in his Kathmandu office where he is busy planning future activities of the organization. Established in 1994, SWAN works in different areas; education and child development being one of its top priorities. (Text and Photos: Manoj Bhusal)

"Things are not perfect though,' accepts Chhatranath Dhakal, 'it would be wonderful to have a school bus, a compound wall and a clean and better organized hostel"

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NGO in Focus

Social Welfare Association of Nepal (SWAN)

Established in: 1994
 President: Mr. Krishna Karki
 Address: GPO Box 19420, Maharajgunj-3, Parmeshwor Marg, Kathmandu, Nepal.
 Tel: 00977 1 4720 776
 Website: www.swannepal.org
Prioritized program sectors:
 Education and Child Development
 Infrastructure
 Health and Sanitation
 Women Empowerment
 Agriculture and Natural Resources Management
 Tourism Development and Institutional Development



Social Welfare Association of Nepal (SWAN) is a

non-profit, non-governmental organization established in 1994, as an initiation by a small group of individuals, who believed in the concept of self-reliant development. SWAN believes that only self-reliance development of a community, by those who are directly and indirectly responsible for the communities and their members can result in sustainable development. This process of change has to include women and men from various occupational and ethnic backgrounds.

SWAN's first step towards development is to establish opportunities for education, which it believes, builds a foundation to alleviate poverty and help

people regain faith in themselves, learn new skills and tap their potential. Every individual needs to recognize their own worth and dignity as responsible citizens of society. They need to be convinced that they are capable of bring about better changes in the world around them.

Guiding Principle

The most important principle for achieving success is self-help. SWAN helps people at the local level recognize their own abilities, resources, and potential, and thereby restore their faith in individual economic and social improvement.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

A PROMISING TICKET OUT OF EXTREME POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.



MONICA JOHN
text & photos

"entrepreneurship and business skills are vital to set youth free from poverty"

"As youth in villages, we lack education and have no access to loans. As a result we are becoming more exposed to poverty"

"Despite the adaptation of the laws and policies regarding youth development, youth are still vulnerable and marginalized in the community. They do not participate in decision making, do not have access to or ownership and control of resources"

Young people must awaken the spirit of entrepreneurship in their hearts as well as learn business skills to rescue themselves economically. Executive Director of Youth Partnership Countrywide (YPC), Israel Ilunde, made the call when speaking to this reporter on what can be done to improve and rescue youth economically.

Ilunde said that young people are facing a number of challenges economically, lack of business skills and entrepreneurial habits being some of them. Saying, "This hinders youth from exploring the benefits of the various opportunities available to them. Therefore, the spirit of entrepreneurship and business skills will empower them economically through exploring and effectively utilizing of the opportunities."

He, however, said that young people while awakening their spirit for entrepreneurial and business skills will need support. Urging, "While the youth are hardly looking for training opportunities, civil society organizations (CSOs) including youth groups should collaborate with the government and donor organizations, as well as other stakeholders, to support the accessibility of entrepreneurship education as well as business studies at affordable cost or if possible, free of charge."

He directed youth to work hard and cultivate a volunteering spirit to develop their talents for employment as well as gain practical on-the-job experience. Meanwhile, he emphasized the need for the government to improve infrastructure,

social services as well as agriculture inputs in villages to discourage the migration of youth to urban areas. Saying, "Youth should rather use urban areas to exchange goods, money and skills for development."

Speaking in separate interviews, youth had the same opinion that entrepreneurship and business skills are vital to set youth free from poverty. Jeremia Sumari from Mbuyuni village, Arumeru District in Arusha said that youth need to be creative in exploring and utilizing every single opportunity coming along in order to reduce their vulnerability to poverty.

Nevertheless, another youth from Oljorovus village in Monduli District in Arusha, Elias Mbise criticized the government for neglecting youth especially those from rural areas, forcing many of them to migrate to urban areas seeking for a better life. He said, "As youth in villages, we lack education and have no access to loans. As a result we are becoming more exposed to poverty."

And Thabita Emmanuel from Olarashi village in Monduli District insisted on the need for self-awareness and commitment among youth as a way to reduce hardship and ensure their development.

Despite the adaptation of the laws and policies regarding youth development, youth are still vulnerable and marginalized in the community. They do not participate in decision making, do not have access to or ownership and control of resources something that undermines



" About 53% of the unemployed people in Tanzania are young people and, thus, without stable livelihoods young people suffer from extreme poverty and social exclusion, often resulting in negative behaviour such as crime, risky sexual activities and drug abuse"

"one of the areas prioritized in the budget is to ensure that public and private education institutes are proving trainings that equips job seekers especially youth with skills and experiences to easily be employed or employ themselves"

their livelihood. Lack of knowledge among youth has been observed to be a reason for this marginalization. About 53% of the unemployed people in the country are young people and, thus, without stable livelihoods young people suffer from extreme poverty and social exclusion, often resulting in negative behaviour such as crime, risky sexual activities and drug abuse. On the other hand, this also has an effect to the government in a way the government misses tax, increase of crime activities as well as the increase of diseases especially sexual transmitted diseases. All of which will be a burden to the government. Conversely, youth entrepreneurship is an important, if not the most promising ticket out of extreme poverty and unemployment for young people.

However, one of the government objectives in 2012/12 budget in dealing with economic challenges is to deal with lack of employment opportunities especially to young people. In so doing, training to young people especially on entrepreneur skills were given priority on the budget of year 2012/13 by both the ministry of employment and labour and the ministry of information, youth, culture and sports.

According to the minister of employment and labour, Hon, Gaudencia M. Kabaka, in her speech while presenting the 2012/13 budget of the ministry, in increasing job opportunities, one of the areas prioritized in the budget is to ensure that public and private education institutes are proving trainings that equips job seekers especially youth with skills and experiences to easily be employed or employ themselves. And, the minister of information, youth, culture and sports, Hon Dr. Fenella E. Mukangara, in her budget speech mentioned that among others, the ministry has planned to provide special but short training on self employment, confidence and entrepreneurs to the

young people who completed their education.

Apart from the government, there are various non-governmental organizations aiming at empowering youth in the country, Tanzania Youth Development Association (TAYODEA) is one of them. The organization's vision is to have the capacitated who are participating in social economic development activities. Mr. Sadiki Shembilu is the TAYODEA economic department Program Manager. He acknowledges the organization's support to accessibility of entrepreneurship education to youth as one of their strategies to empower youth economically. Saying, "We provide free entrepreneurship education to youth to increase the number of youth with business and entrepreneurship skills and who will then be able to creatively and innovatively explore the available opportunities to earn income."

Mr. Shembilu criticises education system of the country which does not equip youth with creativity and empower them to self-employment. Suggesting, "Entrepreneurship education should be included in the education curriculum in all levels of education as well as introduction of incubation program for free business advice in secondary schools and tertiary institutions. This will empower youth to explore the vast available opportunities that can provide employment to them."

Nonetheless, he said that before providing entrepreneurship education, they firstly identify opportunities available in the area where a youth is living through discussing with them on what are the opportunities in the area, what hinders them from exploring and utilizing the opportunities and finally, suggesting ways forward to overcome the challenges and thus, give them a chance to create a project so as to effectively make use of the potential opportunities identified.

"Uganda has established a Youth Enterprise Scheme, a non financial instrument, aimed at providing business development support services for the aspirant youth entrepreneurs and already operating businesses owned by youth"

"A national Youth development Policy 2007 has an objective of facilitating youth to acquire skills and competence for employment. If well emphasized and give priority, it may give a chance to many youth to be creative in developing the spirit of self employment rather than waiting to be employed"



He further mentioned WAVUMA in handeni Tanga, as an example of the program which provides entrepreneurship skills especially to women. The program has the targets of 400 young girls in the district. It not only empowers them through entrepreneurship education but also, encourage self awareness to decrease dependence.

Internationally, there are some of the countries mentioned to have being doing great in their strategies to empower youth, Canada being one of them. With the youth employment strategy, the country has specifically introduced youth entrepreneurship programmes, education, entrepreneurship training and financing. And, according to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) ranking of the countries with respect to the development enterprises and entrepreneurship uptake, Canada has improved its ranking from 16 to 13 in comparison with other countries in the world. The GEM also indicates that young people in Canada from the age of 25-34category started 15.8%of opportunity-based and 28% of necessity based businesses.

As a developing country, India through the ministry of youth affairs has developed the national youth policy (2003-2008) that shapes youth economic development and specifies programs in regards. One of the strategies that embedded with the policy is that of Rural Non-Farm Sector (RNFS) that focuses on rural and tribal youth, out-of-school youth and youth with disabilities. The RNFS has provided support to agricultural sectors through incentives for increasing productivity and savings as well as instruments to improve technologies and modernize inputs. It also, created enterprises opportunities for youth in sectors such as mining food processing, forestry and traditional industries. It also provides program on skills development with particular focus

on entrepreneurship development, education and training, managerial and technical skills.

Furthermore, business development services (BDS) forms an important element of enterprise development within RNFS. The programs and interventions facilitated India's achievement on youth economic empowerment and to occupy GEM 2008 ranking as 6 in the world. And in 2005, Uganda was ranked number 2 in term of GEM 2005 report as the result of the priority the country had given on youth economic development. Uganda has established a Youth Enterprise Scheme, a non financial instrument, aimed at providing business development support services for the aspirant youth entrepreneurs and already operating businesses owned by youth. From Integrated Labour Force Survey (ILFS) 2000/01 people aged between 15 and 35 makes more than 65% of the country's labour force. However, the majority of them are unemployed and thus less utilization of this potential labour force. Besides, they will not be able to contribute in the growth of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Last but yet importantly, increase of crimes and sexual transmitted diseases will challenge the government. Unless strategic, practical and deliberately actions are taken by the government and other stakeholders to overcome youth vulnerability to extreme poverty, the government will not overcome such a heavy burden. The government should now start putting into implementation different policies that have been established and adopted basically for youth development. A national Youth development Policy 2007 has an objective of facilitating youth to acquire skills and competence for employment. If well emphasized and give priority, it may give a chance to many youth to be creative in developing the spirit of self employment rather than waiting to be employed.

Latinos in London: Pride, not Prejudice



By VICTORIA VON
WALDERSEE

" Discrimination has been described by Latin Americans as a severe issue – over 70% feel it holds them back in their day to day lives."

" 'as soon as we say we are from Colombia, people immediately associate us with prostitutes, and do not respect us,' complains Alba."

" 'No Longer Invisible' reveals that 40% of Latin American workers undergo workplace abuse and exploitation and 11% are paid less than the national minimum wage "

For 20 years Maria Luisa has cleaned the house of one family. Every day she spends a good four to six hours in their home, dusting off their personal belongings, witnessing their day to day lives, and probably spending more time in the house than the stroppy teenage son; "but they never talk to me," she sighs. "When I come in, they leave the room, or simply act as though I'm not there. How am I ever supposed to learn English if no-one speaks to me?"

Maria Luisa's case exemplifies many of the problems facing the over 100,000-strong Latin American community in London today. Trapped in a cleaning job with no prospects of rising up in the job market due to international labour law, many Latin Americans qualified for far more sophisticated jobs wind up cleaning the same house for years. Snayra Vergara is an English speaking sociology professor in Colombia with years of experience in social work, teaching, and community projects; however, none of this seemed to matter as she applied for countless jobs in the UK suited to her CV, and was perpetually declined on the grounds that her references were not from the UK and therefore not valid. Six months in cleaning were more than enough for Snayra, who quit to volunteer at Carila Latin American Welfare Group, a non-profit organisation dedicated to protecting the rights of London's Latin American community. Despite ensuing difficulty to make ends meet she at least felt dignified by the work she was doing – helping others in her situation understand British labour and immigration law. She is not alone in her problems; 'No Longer Invisible', the most comprehensive report on the London's Latin community to date, states that only 17% of Latin Americans were in managerial or professional jobs in May 2011 despite the fact that over 30% held managerial jobs in Latin America. Discrimination has been described by Latin Americans as a severe issue – over 70% feel it holds them back in their day

to day lives. Colombian women in particular have expressed anger over the prejudices held towards them; "as soon as we say we are from Colombia, people immediately associate us with prostitutes, and do not respect us," complains Alba. According to a BBC-cited British Social Survey asking 3000 people their opinion on how the country is run, 51% of Britons would like to see immigration reduce 'a lot', a figure that has risen 12% since 1991. An additional 24% would like to see immigration reduce 'a little'. 'No Longer Invisible' reveals that 40% of Latin American workers undergo workplace abuse and exploitation and 11% are paid less than the national minimum wage – a proportion 10 times higher than the average rate for the British population.

The language barrier plays a significant part in issues of discrimination – immigrants are often accused of refusing to learn English, instead forming social circles of only other Latinos and cutting themselves off from British society. Learning English in England may seem a laughably easy task; however, there are more difficulties than meet the eye. Immigrants having difficulty with documentation due to bureaucracy and financial troubles are unable to access certain courses where proof of residence in the UK is required. Costs of courses at language schools are high, and organisations who offer courses for free are having their funds drastically cut. Even if they find a class which would suit their level and financial situation, they will most likely be unable to attend as they work antisocial hours to make ends meet. Understandably, Latin Americans will thus often retreat into the comfort of their native community and culture. In the context of the economic crisis, resentment towards immigrants has risen for a variety of reasons. Most prominent is the fear that immigrants are stealing jobs and the worry that among the drastic cuts being made to welfare under the current government, immigrants are

"Second generation Latin Americans are one of the most productive immigrant groups in the UK, boasting an 85% employment rate and refuting the notion that immigrants will come into Britain and sponge off of the welfare state"

"The Latin American community not only provides the city with salsa, samba and delicious food; as proven above, it also contributes productively to the British economy"



taking a chunk out of the already scarce amount available in benefits to the British population. However, a 'Fullfact' study demonstrates that only 6.6% of working-age non-UK nationals claimed a DWP working age benefit, compared to 16.6% of working-age UK nationals. Additionally, 'No Longer Invisible' states that only one in five Latin Americans have ever been to a general practitioner or claimed welfare benefits from the state. Those that do claim benefits will generally do so in the form of housing or council benefit and tax credits. Second generation Latin Americans are one of the most productive immigrant groups in the UK, boasting an 85% employment rate and refuting the notion that immigrants will come into Britain and sponge off of the welfare state.

In 2001, London housed around 28000 Latin Americans. Within 10 years, that figure quadrupled, and as of May 2011, 113,500 Latin Americans are estimated to live in the capital. Integration and discrimination problems or not, the Latin American community has become a staple part of London's migrant population, and its needs must therefore be addressed. Carila Latin American Welfare Group, Latin American Women's Rights Services, the Ibero-American Alliance, and Latin America House are but a few of London's institutions dedicated to helping Latin Americans settle in the city, offering services ranging from translation and interpretation to signposting and legal advice. Trust for London is currently in the process of setting up an umbrella organisation to better coordinate the efforts of these institutions as each one is cutting down its services due to drastic cuts in funding. According to Cathy McIlwaine, Professor of Geography at Queen Mary (University of London) and an expert on Latin American migration to the UK, the aim of this organisation will not be to ask for specific sums of cash as much as to influence policy relating to Latin American immigrants and get them recognised as a significant portion of the migrant population. However, arguably just as important as the professional advice and advocacy work such organisations conduct is the emotional support they give to immigrants searching

for a friendly face and a word of counsel. Saturday schools, cultural outings and informal get-togethers provide a welcome distraction from the stress of everyday life in a foreign country, and Roman Catholic churches are flooded with Latin Americans.

However, massive gaps in the support network remain. "The days of specific groups getting help from central government are over," says Professor McIlwaine. Demand for labour migrants can be met by Europeans, meaning the central government has "no interest" in the Latin American community; instead, "support comes from local government." Southwark recently became the first borough to recognise Latin Americans as an ethnic categorisation in forms; everywhere else, they are forced to tick the box saying "other", despite the fact that the size of the community is comparable with recognised migrant groups such as Polish workers. This lack of formal recognition creates difficulties relating to documentation and acquiring legal status in the UK. Not enough has been done to clarify the ramifications of the recently enforced Welfare Reform Bill on the lives of the Latin American community, leaving them uncertain about what actions they should take to avoid financial troubles. As a result, Carila and other aforementioned organisations are forced to bear the burden, no easy feat when their own budgets are being slashed.

Few cities enjoy the international reputation of London, and few cities deserve it; its unique character, far-reaching history, and wealth of cultures outweigh many other places across the globe. Its migrant population plays an important part in this; from restaurants and clubs to bookstores and national festivals, London's immigrant offer its native population all kinds of entertainment. The Latin American community not only provides the city with salsa, samba and delicious food; as proven above, it also contributes productively to the British economy. If other London boroughs would follow Southwark's example and recognise Latin Americans as a significant part of the migrant population, more private donors would give to organisations like LAWRS and Carila, and gradually, the problems facing the community could be eradicated. The Latinos are in London to stay, and they need to be treated as such. (Victoria von Walderssee is an undergraduate at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, majoring in Chinese and Development Studies)

Iraq: War's legacy of cancer



Photo: Dr Samira Alani

Contamination from Depleted Uranium (DU) munitions and other military-related pollution is suspected of causing a sharp rise in congenital birth defects, cancer cases, and other illnesses throughout much of Iraq.

Many prominent doctors and scientists contend that DU contamination is also connected to the recent emergence of diseases that were not previously seen in Iraq, such as new illnesses in the kidney, lungs, and liver, as well as total immune system collapse. DU contamination may also be connected to the steep rise in leukaemia, renal, and anaemia cases, especially among children, being reported throughout many Iraqi governorates.

There has also been a dramatic jump in miscarriages and premature births among Iraqi women, particularly in areas where heavy US military operations occurred, such as Fallujah.

Official Iraqi government statistics show that, prior to the outbreak of the First Gulf War in 1991, the rate of cancer cases in Iraq was 40 out of 100,000 people. By 1995, it had increased to 80 out of 100,000 people, and, by 2005, it had doubled to at least 1,600 out of 100,000 people.

North Korea sends threats to LSE students



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Students from London School of Economics have started to receive email threats from the North Korean government, after it was revealed that an undercover BBC crew merged with their delegation to carry out undercover filming from within the secretive state.

In a queer turn of events, students now blame the LSE for "putting them at risk".

LSE last week accused the BBC of putting students in serious danger by becoming part of a college trip to get into North Korea and film.

LSE said BBC deceived the institution with one of its reporters claiming to be a PhD student to gain entry and film.

The students however in a letter to the LSE accused the Institute of putting them in danger by revealing the details of the operation.

"Our main consideration here was that the BBC agreed that the documentary would not reveal our names or that of the LSE," they wrote. "We feel that we have now been put in more risk than was originally the case, as a result of the LSE's decision to go public with their story."

the guardian

Ghana seizes 1m faulty condoms imported from China

Ghana facing 'major public health issue' after condoms supplied to health service found to contain holes and burst easily

Ghana is facing a "major public health issue" after condoms supplied to the country's health service were found to contain holes and burst easily.

More than 1m "Be Safe" condoms have been impounded by the country's food and drugs authority (FDA), which said they were also too small and not adequately lubricated.

"When we tested these condoms, we found that they are poor quality, can burst in the course of sexual activity, and have holes which expose the users to unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease," said Thomas Amedzro, head of drug enforcement at the FDA.

But the FDA said it was investigating how an unknown number of condoms had been distributed to health centres around the country, before the tests were conducted. "We want to get to the bottom of this, and to find out why all the condoms were not presented to us before they went out," said Amedzro.

The FDA is recalling all Be Safe condoms on the market, and said it does not yet know how many have already been distributed. It is standard practice to conduct safety tests on condoms, many of which are imported from China.

Malawi accuses Madonna of 'bullying'



Malawi has accused US singer Madonna of "bullying state officials" after she reportedly complained about her treatment on a visit to the country.

Madonna – who has adopted two Malawian-born children – recently visited 10 primary schools funded by her charity.

The government accused the star of

exaggerating her contribution to the country and demanding VIP treatment.

Madonna's manager accused Malawi's government of having a "grudge" against the singer's charity, Raising Malawi. In a statement to the BBC, Trevor Neilson also accused the government of financial mismanagement of school project funds, and of "harassing organisations that Raising Malawi has donated to".

'Public spat'

Madonna was said to have been angered that she and her entourage were stripped of their VIP status on their way out of the country, the UK's Daily Telegraph reported.

They had to line up with other passengers at the airport and were frisked

by security officials, the report said.

The change in status was said to be the result of a public spat about her charitable work in Malawi.

A harshly-worded statement issued by the office of President Joyce Banda on Wednesday accused Madonna of wanting Malawi "to be forever chained to the obligation of gratitude".

"Granted, Madonna is a famed international musician. But that does not impose an injunction of obligation on any government under whose territory Madonna finds herself, including Malawi, to give her state treatment.

Such treatment, even if she deserved it, is discretionary not obligatory," said the statement.

It accused her of being "a musician who desperately thinks she must generate recognition by bullying state officials instead of playing decent music on the stage".



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