



The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development

## WHAT CAN BE DONE FOR CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICTS?

*Coordinators' Notebook No. 10, October 1991*

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### ***Thailand: The Khmer Women's Association (KWA)***

The debilitating effects of Cambodians' daily life in refugee camps in Thailand have severe repercussions on the physical, emotional and psychological development of the children growing up in these camps. Enforced idleness, passive dependency, inability to lead a meaningful existence, low morale, uncertainty about the future, and the sheer monotony of every day life is a demoralizing reality that eats away at the very fabric of their society. It is against this background that the Khmer Women's Association (KWA) has provided support for families since 1982. The support has involved skills training, basic literacy classes for adults, and special programmes for children zero to five years of age.

Aside from centre based activities, which reach more than 11,000 children and 8,000 adults living in camps near the Cambodian border, the KWA has designed a nonformal child care programme known as "Pushcart" which reaches another 10,000 children. Six staff visit the target areas three times a week with pushcarts filled with toys, scrap materials and a mobile library. The staff is selected from community members who are trained to talk with parents about nutrition, health, safety issues and parent-child interaction. Additionally, parents are encouraged to actively participate in making toys, sewing clothes for the family, and acting as assistant teachers. These pilot schemes provide opportunities for acquiring new skills and knowledge, and for sharing experiences among mothers to improve the quality of their daily lives. To a large extent, the success of these informal child care programmes depends on support from community leaders and the community itself.

Information about this programme is available from: Regional Training and Resource Centre in Early Childhood Care and Education for Asia, A2 Trade Union House Annex, Shenton Way, Singapore 0106. Tele: 2203690.

### ***Mozambique: Now Project***

In early 1991, the Bernard van Leer Foundation started a child-oriented programme in the district of Ilha de Mocambique, Mozambique. During the last year, the district's multi-ethnic population has increased from 40,000 to approximately 50,000 as a result of the country's conflict. There are no day care facilities, and younger children are primarily looked after by their older siblings. Poverty levels have risen dramatically in the last few years, and forty-three percent of the children suffer from malnutrition. The project is aimed at stimulating community organization by setting up a day care centre and running parent education programmes focused on child development and nutrition. These activities are integrated within an agriculture and nutrition programme sponsored by the European Community.

Information about this programme is available from: Bernard van Leer Foundation, P.O. Box 82334, 2508 EH The Hague, The Netherlands. Tele: (31-70) 351-2040, Fax (31-70) 350-2373.

### ***The Gaza Strip: The Classroom is an Oasis of Hope***

The insecurity that characterizes daily life in the Gaza Strip has had a severe psychological impact on all members of the Palestinian society, especially children. In the midst of this violent environment a unique early education programme has been put together by the YMCA in Gaza City. The programme provides children with a relatively secure school environment that is well supplied and clean. Five classrooms serve about 100 five- and six-year-olds from all social and religious groups. All classrooms are decorated with children's artwork. The main goal of the programme is to provide the children with the security they need in order to learn.

Information about this programme is available from: The Forum for Basic Education and International Development, One Eliot Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 01238, USA. Tele: (617) 595-9478, Fax: (617) 495-0527.

### ***Sri Lanka: Every Child is on the Frontline***

For many years Sri Lanka has been plagued by conflict and violence. Although the war is a common topic of discussion in homes and schools, Sri Lankan people go on with their daily routine. Many effects of the war transcend physical health and welfare. Sri Lankan children in battle, living in affected communities and even in villages far away from the front, are particularly vulnerable to those effects. It is widely understood that children respond to the environment in which they are nurtured, and that their own behaviour reflects behaviours they have witnessed. At present, the prevalent behaviour in Sri Lankan communities is the violent resolution of conflict.

UNICEF's assistance to children in this conflict-ridden country is varied, and is in keeping with commitments made in the 1990 World Summit Declaration. The following are specific interventions which are unique to the armed conflict in Sri Lanka.

- **Health care for conflict-ridden areas.** In cooperation with government counterparts, attempts are being made to maintain an adequate supply of essential medicines, and other basic items for health workers and health institutions in affected communities. Where people have been displaced from their homes, efforts are underway to improve the conditions of camps. Every effort is made to ensure that immunization and ORT services reach the infant and preschooler. Supplements in the form of iron and Vitamins A and D are made available. To compensate for the dearth of health workers in certain areas, cadres of volunteers have been recruited and trained from among villagers and community members. Transportation of essential items is undertaken by the government in collaboration with the military, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other NGOs.

- **Help for traumatized children and families.** The need to help families living in conflict affected areas is acute, but interventions are hindered by several factors. Not least is that organizations feel they lack expertise in providing noninstitutional, community-based help for traumatized families. UNICEF drew up a profile of children exposed to conflict and distributed it among policy makers, bureaucrats, and NGOs. This profile describes the experiences, facts, and perceptions of children living in war zones. Designed as a tool for social mobilization, the study highlights the needs of these children and suggests alternative courses of action.

- **A training manual for helping children in situations of armed conflict.** In a simple way the manual, a distance learning device, attempts to translate child-therapeutic strategies into language manageable by the primary caregiver. Accordingly, action by the caregiver is based upon an initial observation of behaviour change. This first step is followed by the implementation of strategies designed to help children express emotions, make sense of experiences, and adjust to loss. Additionally, the manual emphasizes the importance of a family's ability to cope with trauma as part of the rehabilitation exercise. The manual's approach emphasizes current problems referred to the health infrastructure and the family health worker who deals with children and women at the household level in four areas of the country. The overall objective is to integrate these interventions into existing infrastructures and service delivery system which will ensure continuity and sustainability.

- **Education for peace.** While the target population for medical supplies and psychosocial activities is the group of children directly affected by armed conflict, efforts are also being made to address the needs of the Sri Lankan population at large. In this regard, an education for peace project, comprising both a primary school and a media component, has been launched. Partners in the project include the Sri Lanka Ministry of Education, the National Institute of Education (NIE), Worldview International Foundation, Quaker Peace & Service and a local Children's Theatre Organization. The primary school component of the project has one main objective: to equip primary school children with the skills required to solve their interpersonal conflicts in a non-violent manner. Therefore, training teachers is the first step. Materials for classroom use,

currently being tested by primary school teachers throughout the country, have been developed under the direction of NIE. Anticipating the need for careful monitoring and evaluation, and for an ongoing input assessment, school principals will be introduced to peace education principles and programmes. The media component of the project is still in its preliminary stages. A series of short television commercials that depict typical interpersonal conflicts and non-violent solutions to those conflicts are being produced. Plans are also underway for a similar initiative for radio broadcasting as well as for complementary literature and visual aids.

All of these efforts, from medical supplies to psychosocial counselling and education for peace, hold in common a genuine concern for the Sri Lankan child. To some extent, these initiatives are experimental and it is difficult to evaluate their impact. However, they have been undertaken in the spirit of the goals identified during the World Summit for Children and illustrate Sri Lanka's tremendous commitment to its children's survival, growth and development.

Additional information about these programmes can be obtained from: UNICEF Sri Lanka, P.O. Box 143, Colombo, Sri Lanka Tele: (94-1) 586-168.

### ***Angola: Education and Care of the Young Child***

The impact of war in Angola has been devastating. Since the inception of the war in 1960, according to UN estimates, 500,000 young children have died and thousands have been orphaned or abandoned. The war has traumatized and psychologically affected an entire generation of Angolans. As part of UNICEF's activities in the country, the programme for the education and care of the young child is aimed at providing day-care and essential development services to children aged 2 to 6 years. The community-based preschool programme has experienced a rapid growth since its inception in 1987 and has emphasized teacher-training activities as well as the provision of services to young children of female-headed households.

Additional information about this programme is available from: UNICEF Angola, Caixa Postal 2707, Luanda, People's Republic of Angola. Tele: 332-348.

### ***Lebanon: Education for Peace***

Education for peace and child health are the two main components of the 1992-1996 Programme of Co-operation between UNICEF and the Lebanese government. Peace education includes three broad components: 1) early childhood development; 2) basic education; and 3) nonformal education.

The primary objective of the early childhood development programme will be to promote optimal cognitive, emotional and psychosocial growth for preschool children by increasing stimulation and development activities both at home and in the community. The primary education programme will be aimed at reconstructing the basic education system through extensive teacher training supporting the development of new curricula, teaching methods and materials. The nonformal education programme will be designed to foster the development of peaceful cultural

and social patterns, to integrate handicapped and street children into community life, and to help orphaned and abandoned children deal with the trauma of violence and loss. This programme, in collaboration with NGOs in Lebanon, is designed to reach children from different ethnic groups, communities, and regions.

Additional information about this programme is available from: UNICEF Lebanon, P.O. Box 5902, Beirut, Lebanon. Tele: 368-539.

### ***Sudan: Children as “Zones of Peace”***

After years of bloody war in Sudan, UNICEF and other international agencies proposed that civilian populations, and children in particular, should not be held hostages to political and military targets. The fighting and the use of famine relief both as a political and military tool disrupted agriculture production and deepened famine in towns and rural areas. After long negotiations led by UN officials, Sudanese warring parties agreed to grant safe passage to Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS). Since 1989, a coalition of international agencies has been able to deliver medical and food supplies, to immunize children, and to establish emergency water supply and sanitation services. In 1991, convoys crossing the battle lines have helped 7.7 million people. Similar initiatives are taking place in Angola and Ethiopia,

More information about the “corridors of peace” can be obtained from: UNICEF Sudan, P.O. Box 1358, Khartoum, Sudan. Tele: (873-1) 46381.

### ***Zambia: Helping Children Alleviate Stress***

While childhood trauma is often linked with long-term mental health problems, most children survive and overcome this trauma if they have parents and caregivers who can help them. A group of consultants for the International Catholic Child Bureau (ICCB) have trained a group of refugee women in the Ukwimi Refugee Settlement in Zambia to help refugee children alleviate the stress caused by war. Depending on the ages of the children, culturally appropriate activities are selected, such as puppet theatre, autobiographical writing and artwork. The approach is designed to foster an atmosphere of security and acceptance, encouraging children to share and come to terms with their own experiences. Recognizing that the psychosocial well being of refugee children is dependent on maternal well being, interventions for refugee women are also implemented.

Suggestions for parents or caregivers, who notice a change in a child’s behavior:

- Determine the reason for the behavioral change and discuss the *cause* of the problem rather than the child's behavior.
- Respond to children's questions with careful attention and in a language they can understand.
- If you notice a child re-enacting events, allow the child full-expression and observe the child carefully.

- Try to maintain a child's normal routine.

Information about this programme is available from: International Catholic Child Bureau, Inc. (ICCB), 323 East 47th Street, New York, NY, 10017, USA, Tele: (212) 355-3992.

### ***United States: Displaced Salvadoran Families and Children***

Although many refugees from Latin America, Southeast Asia, Africa and the Caribbean have settled in the Washington, D.C. area in the last decade, Salvadorans constitute the largest group. They fled their country when the conflict between the government and the guerrillas escalated in the 1980s. It is estimated that between 500,000 and 900,000 Salvadorans live in the United States and between 80-150,000 live in Washington D.C. The typical family has limited education, and often the children have had little if any schooling. The School-based Mental Health Program was designed to provide care for children and youth at risk of psychological problems due to war displacement. The programme serves schools with a mobile team of social workers and psychologists who organize individual and group sessions with children, families and teachers. These sessions emphasize helping children to develop a personal account of their lives and to foster the development of a positive bicultural self-image. In order to help children break with the widely-shared belief of their families that *"if you don't talk about it, it will eventually go away,"* therapists encourage the child to work with maps to trace their migration to the United States, write letters to a significant person they left behind, and to work with their hands while at play. Programme activities are conducted in English and Spanish.

Information about this programme can be obtained from: Children's National Medical Center, Multicultural Services Division of the Commission on Mental Health, Department of Human Services of the District of Columbia, Washington D.C., 20013, USA. Tele: (202) 724-5466.

### ***United States: Activities in Peace Education and Conflict Resolution***

There are a growing number of initiatives that teach children, parents and educators about peace and conflict resolution. The many activities developed by these groups range from summer camps where children learn to work cooperatively, to activities to enhance children's communication and listening capacities, to mediation training. Settings for peace education and conflict resolution programmes include schools, churches, and community organizations.

An example of this type of work is Starting Small. In October 1990, a group of students at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution in Washington, D.C. were invited to assist a counselor from a local elementary school with a programme designed to train children and teachers in mediating techniques. The training helped children to strengthen their communication skills in a collaborative process of conflict- and problem-solving.

In addition to this initiative, the National Association for Mediation in Education is currently developing over 300 mediation programmes in primary and secondary schools. Children's Creative Response to Conflict is a project that emphasizes training children in cooperation, communication and conflict resolution. Educators for Social Responsibility is an excellent

resource group for curriculum materials on peace education and conflict resolution. Another group activity involved in the education of young children for peace is the Comité Hispano Montessori which bases its work with children on the principles of Maria Montessori: "Peace is a goal that can be attained only through common accord and the means to achieve this unity for peace are twofold: first, an immediate effort to resolve conflict without recourse to violence, in other words, to prevent war; and second, a long-term effort to establish peace among men. Preventing conflict is the work of politics; establishing peace is the work of education." Through its emphasis on peace education and conflict resolution, the Comité Hispano Montessori develops techniques to teach young children concepts of peace. The philosophy of Maria Montessori is found in her book *Education for Peace* as well as in Aline Wolf's *Peaceful Children, Peaceful World*.

Information about these programmes is available from: Starting Small, 6381-B, Washington Blvd., Arlington, Virginia 22213, USA; National Association for Mediation in Education, 425 Amity Street, Amherst, Massachusetts 01002, USA, Educators for Social Responsibility, 23 Garden Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138, USA. Comité Hispano Montessori, 2127 S. 35 Avenue, Omaha, Nebraska 68105, USA. Tele: (402) 345-8810.

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*Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.*  
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