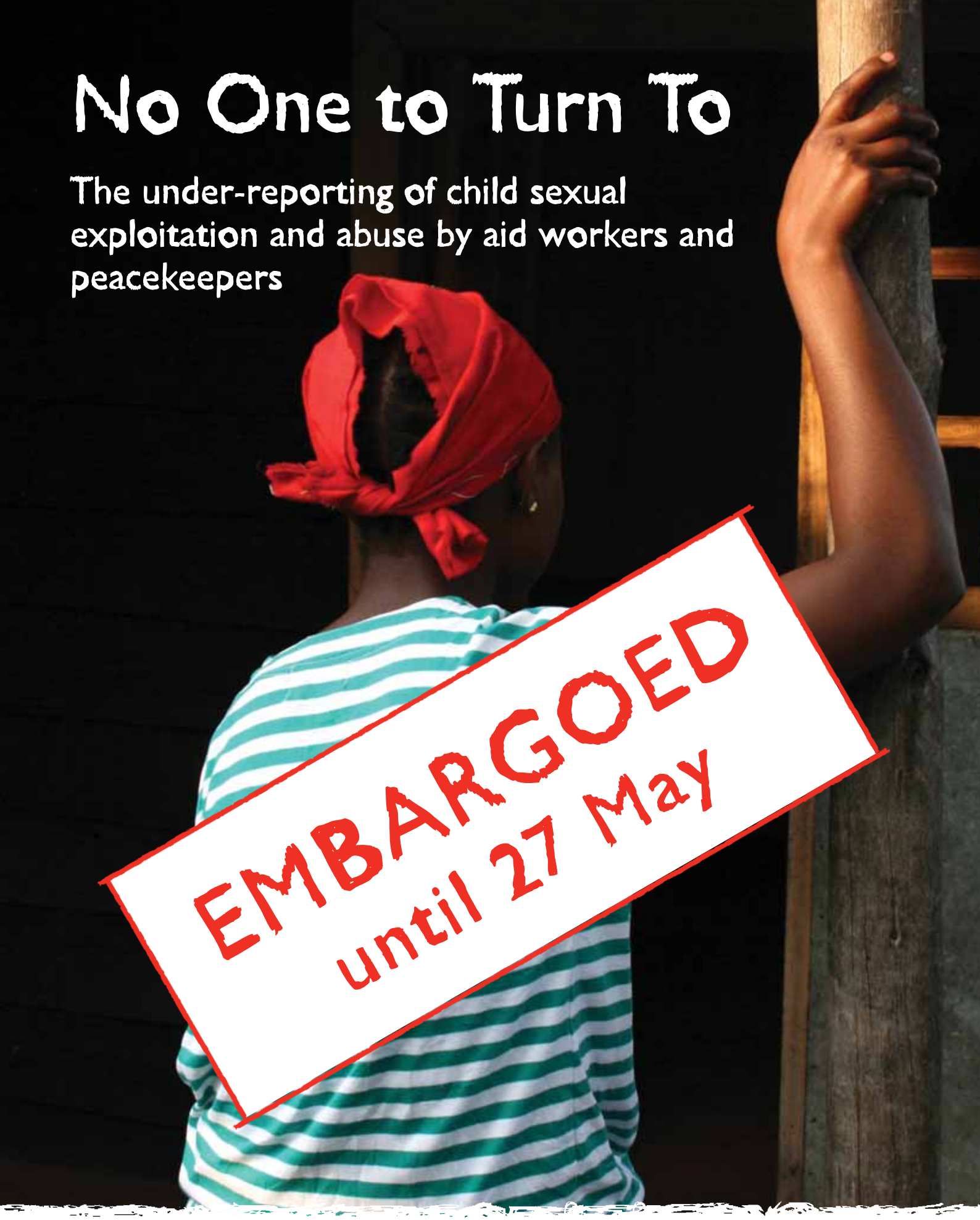
No One to Turn To

The under-reporting of child sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers and peacekeepers



Save the Children
UK

No One to Turn To

The under-reporting of child sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers and peacekeepers

Corinna Csáky

We're the world's independent children's rights organisation. We're outraged that millions of children are still denied proper healthcare, food, education and protection and we're determined to change this.

Save the Children UK is a member of the International Save the Children Alliance, working to change children's lives in more than 100 countries.

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Foreword

In December 2006 I sat with the then United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, other world leaders and UN and NGO representatives at a high-level conference on sexual exploitation and abuse of children by humanitarian workers, peacekeepers and others acting on behalf of the international community. We agreed that much more needed to be done to tackle this problem. But what has really changed since then? Have governments and international institutions followed through on the commitments they made? If not, why not? And what needs to happen now? This paper explores these and related questions, and puts forward a number of proposals to better protect children from abuse and exploitation.

Save the Children is concerned about this issue, not only because we are one of the world's largest child-focused NGOs, but because we are not immune from this problem ourselves. Indeed, awareness of the difficulty in stamping out this problem in our own organisation is a driving force behind our work to find new solutions to it.

We recognise, of course, some of the important steps taken by international organisations on this issue. In the last few years, a wide range of technical guidance, instruments, initiatives and policies have been produced by UN agencies, NGOs and others. Welcome as these are, statements of principle and good intent have yet to be converted into really decisive and concerted international action. If we are serious about reducing the appalling levels of abuse against children, governments and international institutions need to increase significantly the resources allocated to tackling it, and to invest sustained political capital and energy to help find effective and lasting solutions. I hope that this report will inspire and embolden key actors in the international system to do precisely that.

I am grateful to all those people who assisted us in this study. This includes those who took part in the fieldwork in Southern Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and Haiti, especially those who have been victims of abuse. We are also grateful to our programme partners. Without their support, this report would not have been possible.

Jasmine Whitbread
Chief Executive
Save the Children UK

Glossary

International community

United Nations (UN) agencies, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their local implementing partners

Aid worker

Any person, whether local or international, working for or in association with the international community

Child

Any person who is under the age of 18

Peacekeeper

An armed person serving within a mission of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)

Sexual exploitation

Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another[1]

Sexual abuse

The actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under equal or coercive conditions[2]

Abbreviations and acronyms

BSO	Building Safer Organizations
DSA	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DFS	UN Department of Field Support
DPA	UN Department of Political Affairs
DPI	UN Department of Public Information
DPKO	UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DSS	UN Department of Safety and Security
ECHA/ECPS Task Force	Executive Committees on Humanitarian Affairs and Peace and Security UN and NGO Task Force on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*
ECHO	Humanitarian Affairs Department of the European Commission
HAP-I	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
OHRM	Office of Human Resources Management (of the UN)
OIOS	Office for Internal Oversight Services (of the UN)
OLA	Office of Legal Affairs (of the UN)
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
UN	United Nations
UNDGO	UN Development Group Office
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFIP	United Nations Fund for International Partnerships
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
WFP	UN World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

* Membership of the Task Force includes: DFS; OCHA; BSO of HAP International; Christian Children's Fund; DESA/Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women; DPA; DPI; DPKO; DSS; Human Rights Watch; Interaction; IFRC; IOM; IRC; Keeping Children Safe Coalition; OHCHR; OHRM; OIOS; OLA; Oxfam; Peace Women; Refugees International; Save the Children UK; UNDGO; UNDP; UNFIP; UNFPA; UNHCR; UNICEF; UNOPS; WFP; and WHO.

1 Introduction

In this report we focus on ways to improve the international community's response to the sexual exploitation and abuse of children by aid workers, peacekeepers and others acting on their behalf in emergencies. Every instance of such abuse is a gross violation of children's rights and a betrayal of the core principles of humanitarian action.[3]

This report draws particular attention to the problem of the under-reporting of such abuse and addresses a range of related issues. It is not a detailed technical document, but aims to bring new evidence into discussions among policy-makers, politicians and those grappling at the local level with the obstacles to effective action.

Our research suggests that significant levels of abuse of boys and girls continue in emergencies, with much of it going unreported. The victims include orphans, children separated from their parents and families, and children in families dependent on humanitarian assistance. The existence of this problem has been widely known since 2002 and various positive steps have begun to be taken to eliminate it. A high level conference in New York in December 2006, attended by the UN Secretary General, reaffirmed the commitment of UN agencies and other international actors to vigorous action.

Save the Children welcomes the many initiatives and actions taken since 2002. These include the development of codes of conduct, better interagency cooperation, new mechanisms to encourage the reporting of abuse and a proactive response, and the preparation of training, information and guidance material. Collectively these measures represent a serious attempt to respond to an issue that only recently became visible.

Crucially, however, many of these measures are dependent on the willingness and ability of children and their carers to report the abuse they experience. If this is not assured, then the system as a whole will remain fundamentally flawed. Evidence from three countries suggests that much more needs to be done by international actors to encourage and support reporting by children and adults so that local communities have confidence in the new system.

Breaking the silence surrounding this problem is an essential step towards its elimination. Our research suggests that children and their families are not speaking out because of a mix of stigma, fear, ignorance and powerlessness. In addition, it appears that at the grassroots level international agencies are not yet perceived as responding effectively to allegations – with the consequence that victims and others cannot see the point of reporting abuse. Together, these two factors are a major impediment to stamping out this problem.

The report concludes that there are three important gaps in existing efforts to curb abuse and exploitation.

1. Communities – especially children and young people – are not being adequately supported and encouraged to speak out about the abuse against them.
2. There is a need for even stronger leadership on this issue in many parts of the international system – notably to ensure that good practices and new procedures are taken up and implemented.
3. There is an acute lack of investment in tackling the underlying causes of child sexual exploitation and abuse in communities – abuse not just by those working on behalf of the international community but by a whole range of local actors.[4]

Our recommendations (summarised overleaf), which are presented more fully later in this report, seek to respond to these challenges.

Recommendations

- **Effective local complaints mechanisms** should be set up in-country to enable people to report abuses against them.
- **A new global watchdog** should be established to monitor and evaluate the efforts of international agencies to tackle this abuse and to champion more effective responses.
- **Tackling the root causes or drivers of abuse** should become a greater priority for governments, donors and others in the international community, including the development of stronger child protection systems at the national level.

Save the Children does not claim to have all the answers, or to be immune to this problem. Indeed, awareness of the difficulty of stamping this out in our own organisation is a driving force behind this report. We do believe, however, that eliminating this abuse is a key responsibility of every international actor.

2 Methodology

This report is the result of a global investigation into the nature and extent of the problem and an exploration of new ways to stop it. It was not intended to be a detailed empirical study, but rather a snapshot of the situation for children in different emergencies and fragile states.

Key sources

In order to build a well-informed picture we drew on several different sources:

- 38 focus group discussions with a total of 341 people living in chronic emergencies in three countries. This included 129 girls and 121 boys aged between 10 and 17 years, as well as 36 men and 54 women. We also conducted individual in-depth interviews with several of these people
- meetings with 30 humanitarian, peace and security professionals working at national, regional and international levels. These included staff from within Save the Children UK, other international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governments, and several United Nations (UN) agencies
- desk-based research on a cross-section of humanitarian, peace and security organisations to understand their policies and procedures and their effectiveness, as well as on the prevalence of allegations and how they are handled
- desk-based research into existing models of independent performance monitoring and enforcement, and complaints mechanisms from the humanitarian, peace and security, and public service sectors.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork visits were conducted in 2007 in Southern Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and Haiti. Each visit involved research in at least two different sample areas in which abuse had already been identified anecdotally and with people for whom this issue had already been noted as a concern. Field visits focused on towns, villages and rural areas, rather than on refugee camps. Every effort was taken to protect the identity and security of all research participants.

Focus group discussions were conducted by two Save the Children staff, together with local interpreters. Each group contained on average ten people, with children and adults meeting in separate groups according to age and gender. A range of participatory techniques was used to increase the numbers of excluded and marginalised children and adults taking part. It was made clear that discussions were for research purposes, and any disclosures of abuse would not be acted on without permission from the individual. This level of confidentiality arguably enabled beneficiaries to come forward with information that they would not normally have disclosed within regular reporting mechanisms.

The focus of this report is wholly on abuse committed by aid workers and peacekeepers and other local and foreign staff associated with the international community. The aim is to highlight an urgent problem needing more international attention. However, we recognise that this problem often goes hand in hand with abuse committed by individuals within the community, such as businessmen, teachers and the police, as well as abuse committed within children's own families.[5]

Focus group discussion questions

The central questions considered within the focus group discussions included:

1. How many times have you seen, heard about, or experienced different kinds of sexual exploitation and abuse of children by peacekeepers or aid workers in your community?
2. Which children are most vulnerable to this abuse?
3. Which humanitarian, peace or security organisations are the perpetrators of abuse most likely to come from?
4. Have you ever reported an abuse or have you heard of others in the community doing so?
5. How would you report an abuse?
6. What other action might you take in response to a case of abuse?
7. What are the reasons why someone in your community might not report an abuse?
8. What can be done to encourage people in your community to report an abuse?
9. What other action should be taken to stop this abuse happening?

Limitations

- It was not always possible to meet with sector professionals from other humanitarian, peace and security organisations at field level because of the need to maintain a degree of confidentiality around the field visits, so as to protect the identity of the communities taking part.
- The taboos and sensitivity surrounding sexual exploitation and abuse mean that respondents may not have always been entirely open about their experiences or views – any bias, however, would be towards underestimating rather than overestimating the scale of abuse.
- Given that Save the Children staff led the fieldwork, it is possible that some research participants felt unable to speak openly about our organisation or those associated with it. However, every effort was made to reassure people and to encourage them to be forthcoming.
- The precise remit of the study, focusing only on abuse committed by aid workers and peacekeepers and not by ordinary members of the community, was not always easy to communicate. Although we made extensive efforts to do this, and to check comprehension, the possibility remains that, in a few cases, participants referred to abuses originating outside of the scope of this report.
- Language barriers may have limited communication. Some parts of the fieldwork had to be conducted in two or sometimes three different languages at any one time. It is possible, therefore, that some of the more complex meanings were lost in translation.
- The lack of statistical data from organisations outside of the UN meant that it was not possible to analyse trends from NGOs and other non-UN organisations.

3 How are children being abused?

> **"My friends and I were walking by the National Palace one evening when we encountered a couple of humanitarian men. The men called us over and showed us their penises. They offered us 100 Haitian gourdes (US$2.80) and some chocolate if we would suck them. I said no, but some of the girls did it and got the money."**
>
> (15-year-old girl, Haiti)

Our research identified every kind of child sexual abuse and exploitation imaginable, including:

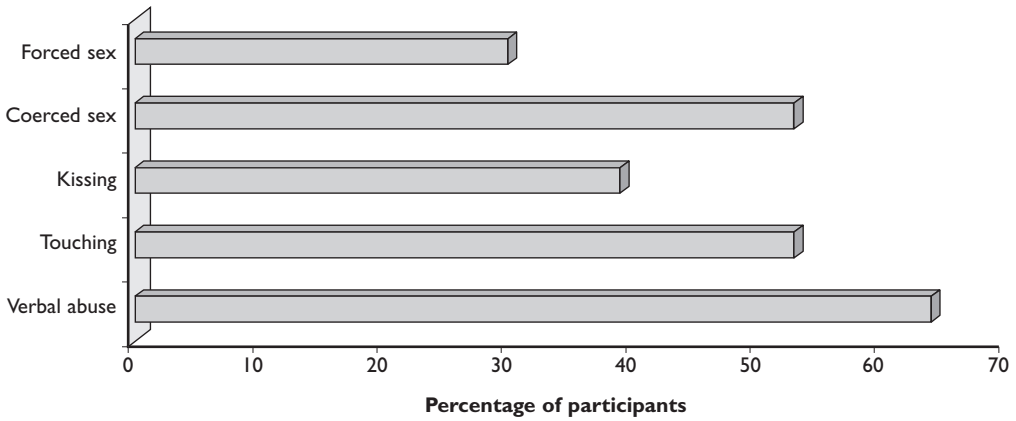
- **trading sex** for food and other non-monetary items or services
- **forced sex**, where an adult physically forces a child to have penetrative sex with them
- **verbal sexual abuse**, where an adult says sexually indecent words to a child
- **child prostitution**, where an adult pays money to have sex with a child
- **child pornography**, where a child is filmed or photographed performing sexual acts
- **sexual slavery**, where a child is forced to have sex with an adult by someone else who receives payment
- **indecent sexual assault**, where an adult touches a child in a sexual manner or makes a physical sexual display towards them
- **child trafficking linked with commercial sexual exploitation**, where a child is transported illicitly for the purposes of child prostitution or sexual slavery.

Research participants also described a range of specific sexual acts being performed by children for staff associated with the international community. These included oral sex, penetrative sex, lesbian sexual displays, kissing and groping. *"The men touched me. They touched my breasts and took out their penises and showed them to me."* (Young girl,[6] Haiti)

It is important to note that all forms of sex with children below the age of consent are illegal.[7] A child cannot be considered to have voluntarily taken part in a sexual act, and all forms of penetrative sex with a child are rape. However, for the purposes of this study we have tried to distinguish between children who are physically forced to have sex and those coerced into it owing to a lack of alternative survival tactics or through ignorance of their rights.

As Figure 1 (overleaf) shows, focus group participants identified coerced sex as more common than forced sex. Children as young as six are trading sex with aid workers and peacekeepers in exchange for food, money, soap and, in a very few cases, luxury items such as mobile phones. Although forced sex was reported to be the least common, adults and children in all fieldwork locations visited as part of this study emphasised that it was of key concern to them. Many incidences of forced sex perpetrated by individuals and groups were cited. Verbal sexual abuse was identified to be the most common. Cases of sexual touching were cited by more than half the fieldwork participants and kissing by just over one-third.

Fig.1: Types of abuse most commonly identified



Source: 38 focus group discussions across Southern Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and Haiti

These findings are compounded by a wealth of anecdotal evidence of abuse by peacekeepers and aid workers:

"Although the peacekeepers are not based here, they have abused girls here. They come here a few days at a time where they stay in a local compound. This compound is near to the water pump where everyone collects water. In the evening hours the peacekeepers come out and stand near to the water pump. Some of the girls from the village will come and collect water. The men call to the girls and they go with them into the compound. One of them became pregnant and then went missing. We still do not know where she is. This happened in 2007."

(Young boy, Southern Sudan)

"There is a place not far from here where I go to visit my relatives. The men call to me in the streets and they ask me to go with them. But I don't go. They do this with all of us young girls. I have a few friends that have gone to bed with them. Some of them are asked to give them a lesbian show, and they are paid for that."

(Young girl, Haiti)

"We all work at the peacekeeping camp. We have worked there every day since they arrived in 2003… we sell them sculpture and jewellery. I go there so that I can earn money to contribute to the family income in order to cover all that I need."

"If there are other things that they want and they can't talk about in front of other people, they invite us to their rooms to tell us what they want us to do for them. They ask us for various types of favours."

"Sometimes they ask us to find them girls. They especially ask us for girls of our age. Often it will be between eight and ten men who will share two or three girls. When I suggest an older girl, they say that they want a young girl, the same age as us."

"I find them girls in the town. I know which girls have done it before and I go and ask them. When I ask the girls to come they are often keen because of the gifts that are promised, such as mobile phones and food rations…"

"The peacekeepers hide it from their supervisors and their friends who are not in their immediate group. Because when this kind of thing happens you have to keep it confidential. Otherwise, if others hear about the activities, then the men will be punished."

"For us, we said to ourselves that even if it is bad, we are gaining something from it too. So we continue because we then get the benefits, such as money, new t-shirts, souvenirs, watches and tennis shoes."

"They also used their mobile phones to film the girls."

(Three boys aged 14 from Côte d'Ivoire)

4 Who is it happening to?

"There is a girl who sleeps in the street, and there were a group of people in the streets who decided to make money off of her. They took her to a man who works for an NGO. He gave her one American dollar and the little girl was happy to see the money. It was two in the morning. The man took her and raped her. In the morning the little girl could not walk."

(Young boy, Haiti)

Our fieldwork suggests that already vulnerable children are particularly at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation by peacekeepers and aid workers. These include orphans and children separated from their parents; those from especially poor families; children who are discriminated against; children displaced from their home communities; and children from families who depend on humanitarian assistance. The particular risks to already vulnerable children should be considered when identifying ways to prevent the abuse from happening and for targeting support services to victims.

"The girls are orphans. They don't have a mother or a father. If they think the abuse can help them they will go and try to do these things to get food."

(Teenage girl,[8] Southern Sudan)

"In our community we used to protect separated children. But now those that are alone are very vulnerable."

(Teenage boy, Southern Sudan)

Nearly half of the people we spoke to identified orphans and children separated from their parents as the most likely to be abused. Parents were seen as the main protectors and providers for children. Without parents, many children are forced to use transactional sex as a survival tactic. Many are living and working on the street and are not registered for humanitarian assistance and other basic services. While a few people cited the possibility of staying with an uncle or other extended family members, this did not equate with the level of care and protection provided by a parent. Parents were also seen as essential for providing an adequate response to a case of abuse. For example, if an orphan girl were abused she would not have a parent to help her to pursue medical assistance or to seek redress. Perpetrators of abuse arguably target orphans and separated children, since they are least likely to report them to the authorities: *"This happens especially to orphans. An orphan cannot say anything against her abuser because she has nothing."* (Adult woman, Southern Sudan)

Focus group participants identified children as young as six having been abused. Younger children were said to be more vulnerable to abuse than older children. However, the most common age to be a victim of abuse was thought to be 14 or 15 years old.

The majority of beneficiaries we spoke to identified girls as being far more likely to become victims of abuse than boys. In Southern Sudan and Côte d'Ivoire no boys were identified by focus group participants as victims of abuse. However, child protection professionals working in the same areas cited cases of abuse against both girls and boys. Moreover, focus group participants in Haiti identified several cases of sexual abuse of boys. *"There's a man who works for* [an international organisation] *who gave 400 Haitian gourdes to a 13-year-old and he took his bottom with his two hands and then he went away with him and raped him."* (Young boy, Haiti)

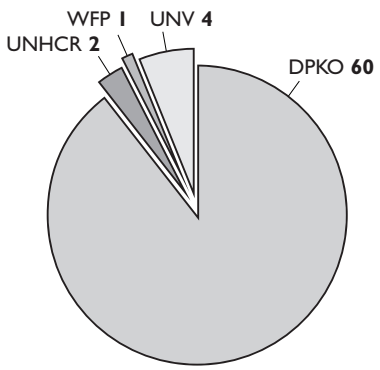
5 Who are the abusers?

Every agency is at risk from this problem. This is not to say that every person associated with the international community is a perpetrator of child sexual abuse – far from it. However, the breadth of local and international NGOs, UN agencies and other actors implicated by those who took part in the study suggests that this is a problem for a wide range of organisations.

Our fieldwork revealed cases of abuse associated with a sum total of 23 humanitarian, peacekeeping and security organisations. These include civil humanitarian agencies such as those delivering food and nutritional assistance, care, education and health services, reconstruction, shelter, training, and livelihood support, as well as military actors providing peace and security services.

Troops associated with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) were identified as a particular source of abuse in some of our fieldwork locations, particularly in Haiti and Côte d'Ivoire. Indeed, of the 38 groups of people we spoke to, 20 of them identified peacekeepers as the most likely perpetrators, and four identified them as the only perpetrators within their communities. This is likely to be linked with the fact that peacekeepers make up the largest proportion of emergency personnel in some of our research locations. However, even in areas with mixed representation from the international community, peacekeepers were identified as a key source of concern.

Fig. 2: Numbers of allegations of sex with minors reported against staff from DPKO, WFP, UNHCR and UNV during 2005



Source: United Nations annual reports of the UN Secretary-General's bulletin, *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* A/59/782 (15 April 2005); A/60/861 (24 May 2006); and A/61/957 (15 June 2007)

Official UN statistics also show a higher incidence of allegations reported against peacekeeping forces than any other UN staff.[9] As Figure 2 shows, of the four UN agencies who reported allegations of sex with minors in 2005, DPKO staff were implicated in the vast majority of cases.[10] While this may be a true indication of conduct associated with military actors, it may also reflect the particular efforts invested by DPKO to monitor and report on abuses associated with its own staff. Indeed, Save the Children welcomes the managerial courage and transparency DPKO has shown in making these allegations publicly available.

Although we did not set out to explore the reasons why perpetrators of abuse are disproportionately represented among DPKO, our own fieldwork, as well as other reports, point to certain factors.[11] Peacekeepers are capable of exerting particular influence over the communities in which they serve, especially over children and young people. This is largely due to the fact that they are armed and provide much-needed physical security within contexts of extreme fragility. Furthermore, peacekeeping forces contain a significant number of military personnel with discriminatory attitudes to women.[12]

Fieldwork participants also identified perpetrators within a range of civil humanitarian actors. This includes staff from several UN agencies, and local and

international NGOs, as well as religious groups. *"NGO workers bring a lot of young girls to the boarding school where they run the training. The trainers abuse the girls and some of them* [the girls] *leave pregnant."* (Young girl, Southern Sudan)

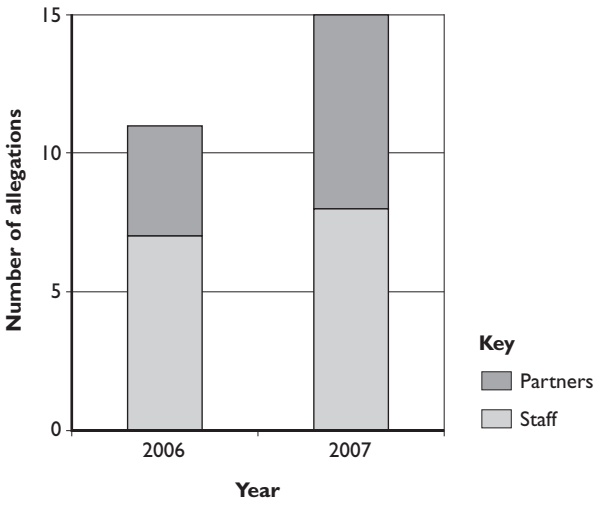
A broad spectrum of different types of aid workers and peacekeepers were implicated in the abuse. For example, staff at every level, from guards and drivers to senior managers, were identified as having been involved. Participants also implicated a mix of local, national and international personnel, including staff described as 'black,' 'white,' 'foreign' and 'local' people. While the overwhelming majority of perpetrators were thought to be men, a few participants identified women as having abused boys: *"One day two boys who ran errands for the* [international organisation] *saw a woman go into the bush and give a boy of 13 a blow-job."* (Young boy, Côte d'Ivoire)

While the focus of this study is on sexual exploitation and abuse committed by those associated with the international community, it is important to recognise the inextricable links with the local context. Abuse is also perpetrated by several members of the local community, including teachers, the police, the military, and within the family. Previous reports also suggest that where abuse is prevalent in the local community, children are more likely to be abused by staff associated with international organisations, and vice versa.[13] *"The humanitarian staff committing the abuse are often from the local community. Therefore, you cannot consider abuse by humanitarian workers and abuse by other people separately. You need to think of them both together and deal with them both together."* (Adult woman, Southern Sudan)

Save the Children UK's experience of abuse

While Save the Children UK staff were not directly implicated in our fieldwork, we acknowledge that we too are not immune to this problem. Our global Safeguarding Children System deals every year with a small number of cases where staff and other representatives associated with us have failed to adhere to the standards of behaviour expected within our Code of Conduct. As Figure 3 shows, the total number of allegations of misconduct towards children made against our staff and partners in 2007 was 15. Seven allegations were made against partners and eight against our own staff, of which three were proven and led to dismissal. This was up from 11 allegations in 2006, when four allegations were made against partners and seven against our own staff. Of the latter, four were proven and led to dismissal, and one was additionally referred to national authorities.

Fig. 3: Number of allegations of sexual misconduct made against staff and partners of Save the Children UK reported in 2006 and 2007



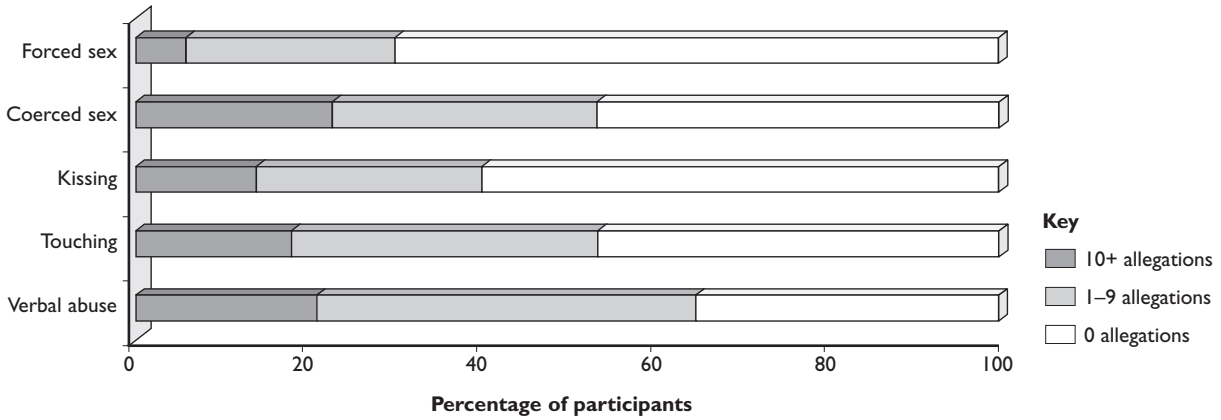
6 What is the scale of abuse?

While anecdotal evidence suggests that this kind of abuse is a global problem prevalent in every emergency, there is very little data to substantiate this hypothesis. Few UN Agencies and NGOs collect detailed information on the abuse of children by their own personnel, and even fewer make this information publicly available. In addition, much of the existing information on sexual violence in humanitarian contexts is not disaggregated or detailed enough to draw concrete conclusions.

Our own fieldwork suggests that the scale of abuse is significant. We asked participants to state the number of incidents of different kinds of abuse involving peacekeepers and aid workers that they could recall having occurred in their community. As Figure 4 demonstrates, nearly two-thirds of participants recalled incidents of verbal sexual abuse. More than half of the research participants identified incidents of sexual touching and coerced sex. Of these, 18% and 23% respectively were able to recall ten or more of such incidents. In only four of the 38 groups of people we spoke to were individuals unable to recall any incidents of abuse having occurred.

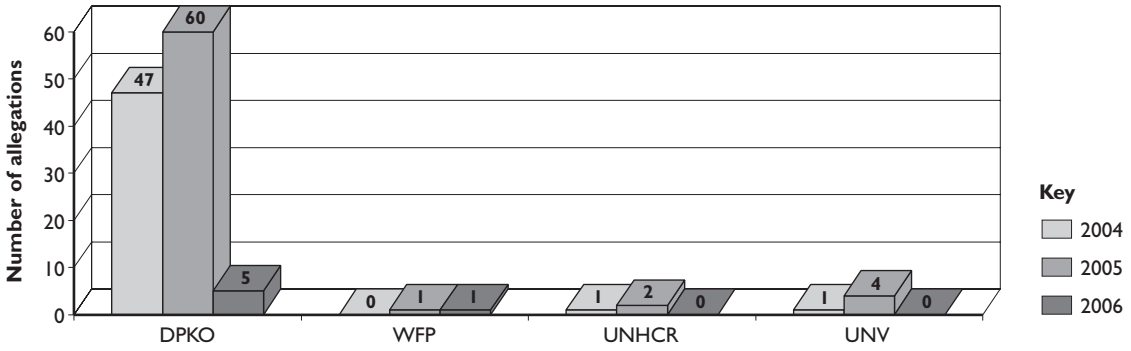
The high level of abuse suggested by our fieldwork is corroborated by similar findings from other sources. In Liberia in 2006, Save the Children UK reported high levels of abuse of girls, some as young as eight.[14] In 2004 it was reported that in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) many girls and women traded sex for food and other items with peacekeepers as a survival tactic.[15] During the UN mission in Cambodia in 1992/93, the number of prostitutes rose from 6,000 to 25,000, and this included an increase in the number of child prostitutes.[16] In 2003 Italian, Danish and Slovak peacekeepers were expelled from Eritrea in separate incidents for having sex with minors.[17] In 2000, US civilians and Jordanian, Pakistani and German military troops associated with the peacekeeping mission in

Fig. 4: Proportion of research participants who could identify allegations of abuse in their communities



Source: 38 focus group discussions across Southern Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and Haiti

Fig. 5: Allegations of sex with minors against DPKO, WFP, UNHCR and UNV between 2005 and 2006



Source: Annual reports of the UN Secretary-General's bulletin, *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* A/59/782 (15 April 2005); A/60/861 (24 May 2006); and A/61/957 (15 June 2007)

Bosnia and Herzegovina were investigated for trafficking in young women.[18] Furthermore, Refugees International reports that "an influx of large numbers of unaccompanied foreign men into post-conflict societies is often associated with increased incidents of prostitution and gender-based violence".[19]

Conversely, official statistics on the scale of abuse appear disproportionately low in comparison to the levels suggested by our fieldwork and other reports.[20] As Figure 5 demonstrates, of the four UN agencies that reported allegations of sex with minors each year between 2004 and 2006, the total number during that period was just 121.[21] In 2006 371 new allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse of any beneficiary (ie, including adults and children) were reported against staff from a total of 41 UN agencies worldwide,[22] down from 373 in 2005 and up from 121 in 2004.[23] Faced with the same possibility of under-reporting, Save the Children UK has increased efforts to strengthen the practical application of its safeguarding policy, for example, by including it as a core component of our internal audit process.

Clearly there is significant disparity between the low levels of abuse cited in these statistics and the high levels suggested in field investigations and other evidence. As we shall go on to examine, it is very likely that this is linked with a large-scale under-reporting of abuses.

7 Why is abuse under-reported?

"We have never heard of anyone reporting the cases of abuse."

(Teenage girl, Côte d'Ivoire)

A key finding of our fieldwork was the chronic under-reporting of abuse. The overwhelming majority of people we spoke to would not report a case of abuse themselves and had never heard of others in the community doing so.

The reporting of abuse is fundamental to keeping children safe. If cases of abuse are not reported to the international community, it cannot stop the abuse from reoccurring, punish the perpetrator, or help the victim. Under-reporting also perpetuates a lack of accountability for the abuse, since it underplays the scale of the problem.

Reporting an abuse requires information being passed on to those people responsible for responding to it. This may occur through various channels of communication, including parents, children and young people, community groups, the police, and staff associated with NGOs, the UN or others associated with the international community.

Our research suggests several reasons for the chronic under-reporting evident in the gap between the levels of abuse indicated by research and the statistics collected by agencies. Many of these reasons are symptomatic of broader failures within the international community. First, people are not speaking out for fear of **losing much-needed material assistance**. In particular, children who trade sex for food or other forms of support are unwilling to jeopardise this survival tactic. *"He's using the girl but without him she won't be able to eat."* (Teenage girl, Côte d'Ivoire) This implies that assistance provided by the international community is either not enough to sustain vulnerable populations or that it is not reaching those most in need. Similar concerns are felt by entire beneficiary communities: *"People don't report it because they are worried that the agency will stop working here, and we need them."* (Teenage boy, Southern Sudan)

Save the Children UK's reporting procedure

Under Save the Children UK's 'Safeguarding Children Policy', if a child or other person in the community discloses an abuse to a member of our staff, we are contractually obliged to report it, regardless of whether it was committed by our own staff, someone from another international organisation or an ordinary member of the local community.

The staff member who identifies the abuse reports it to their senior manager. This information is then taken directly to the Chief Executive of Save the Children UK in London, who oversees proper follow-up. Senior managers at country level ensure that the allegation is reported to their counterpart in the organisation responsible for the abuse. If it involves one of our own staff, the allegation is immediately investigated and referred to the police, if necessary. At every stage of this process the best interests of the child are prioritised.

Cases of abuse also go unreported for fear of **stigmatisation**. The victim of abuse often will not speak out for fear of being discriminated against. As one young girl from Côte d'Ivoire said: *"Your name will be ruined."* This is particularly pertinent for children who are coerced into sex, such as trading sex for food, rather than forced to have sex. In such cases the child is far more likely to be blamed and stigmatised by the abuse. *"The reason why most girls are not confident to report is that the message will go straight to the community that she is not a girl any more, that she is spoiled, and no one will want to marry her and no one will look after her. So she just keeps quiet."* (Young girl, Southern Sudan)

In Southern Sudan some people are unwilling to report abuse owing to the **negative economic impact** it may have on them and their families. Here, many traditional families greatly depend on the cattle they receive as a dowry in exchange for marriage to their daughters. Indeed, this is a fundamental part of the social and economic fabric of certain traditional societies. If their daughter is associated with sexual abuse she may become less 'valuable' and worth fewer cattle. This is especially common in poor rural communities, which are often the most vulnerable in conflict and disaster. *"We are using the girls like trade for us. We are keeping them so that they will marry and we can benefit from the marriage. That is why we bring them up. If your daughter has been abused, that means that the man has destroyed all your hard efforts. You go back to zero."* (Adult woman, Southern Sudan)

The **threat of retribution or retaliation** is also a major deterrent against reporting abuse. Many children said their parents would beat them if they told them that they themselves had been abused. In relation to reporting abuse on behalf of others, some children fear being physically attacked by the family of the victim for associating their child with the stigma of abuse. Others fear retaliation from the international organisation itself: *"No one would go to the organisation – not even the local leader, as he is scared of them kicking him out of the village."* (Young girl, Haiti) Some people also fear retaliation from the abuser if they spoke out. Indeed, one-third of the people we consulted in Haiti said they thought children in their communities were not reporting abuse, in part due to a fear of physical retribution by the perpetrator: *"Some children are scared they might be killed by the perpetrator."* (Young boy)

Cultural norms and values can dictate a certain level of **acceptance of, or resignation to, abuse**, which in turn prevents it from being reported. These can be entrenched traditional values as well as new social norms cultivated during an emergency.[24] Sexual violence is sometimes regarded as a normal part of sexual relations. Also, gender inequalities can mean that girls are not seen as being entitled to adequate care and protection. More generally, research participants described a chronic lack of awareness of rights: *"We don't know our rights in the village. If we were educated we would know our rights and would follow them to the end."* (Adult male, Côte d'Ivoire) This is in spite of the fact that 68% of those asked had received some form of awareness-raising on this type of abuse.[25]

Many people **do not know how to report** an allegation of sexual abuse. Nearly two-thirds of focus group participants said they felt clear on what action to take if they identified abuse. However, when pressed as to what reporting options they would pursue, it was much less evident that the organisation with responsibility for follow-up would hear about it. For example, the majority of children said they would tell a member of their family, yet it was not clear how this would lead to the international organisation responsible being informed. Only a handful of participants volunteered formal reporting options, such as a child protection officer within an NGO or a local child protection committee. No mention was made of the dedicated focal people for sexual exploitation and abuse currently in place within some humanitarian and peacekeeping organisations. More generally, beneficiaries, and emergency staff themselves, are confused by the many different reporting procedures specific to individual organisations.

Many people **feel powerless to report** an abuse. *"All these things, if they happened, we would not have the power to talk about them."* (Young girl, Southern Sudan) Children in particular identified several barriers to reporting abuses. Many said that the authorities would not believe them, and few feel able to report an allegation without the support of a parent. This is particularly pertinent when considering that orphans and children separated from their parents are especially vulnerable to abuse. Even adult beneficiaries feel blocked from approaching the relevant staff member to report an abuse: *"How will we even get in to see the managers?"* (Adult man, Côte d'Ivoire) Several research participants, particularly those from Haiti, identified discrimination associated with class, race and ethnicity as a key source of powerlessness to report an abuse.

The **lack of effective legal services** is another major barrier to reporting abuse. Many communities experiencing humanitarian crises lack effective police and judicial services to which cases of abuse can be reported. For example, during times of conflict some government services are not available in rebel-held territory. In other cases, the police were cited as wholly ineffective in receiving reports. *"Who would we tell? We wouldn't tell the police because they are afraid of the peacekeepers and they can't do anything. Anyway, I've heard that the police do this kind of abuse too."* (Young boy, Haiti)

This is linked with a chronic **lack of faith in the response** an allegation of sexual abuse will receive, which is another major disincentive for reporting it: *"Some cases of abuse are reported and the fact that nothing happens can put other people off coming forward."* (Adult male, Côte d'Ivoire)

This last point will be examined in more detail in the next section, since it is critical both for reporting abuse and for eliminating it altogether.

8 Why are allegations of abuse not properly responded to?

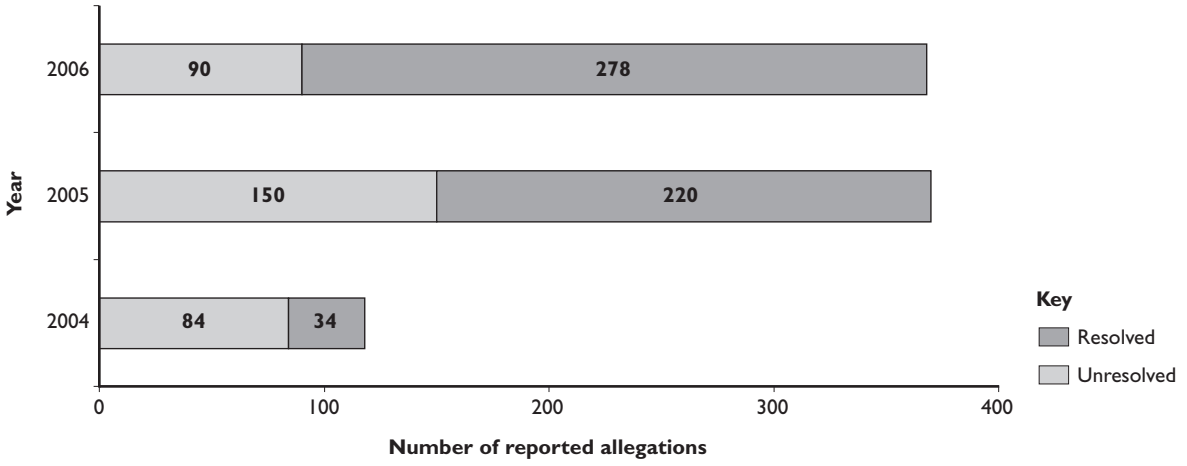
"If something happens you should report it. But in addition to this there must be action taken. For example, the organisation should dismiss the person so that other men will learn that you cannot go around abusing children in this way. Often no action is taken and that is the problem."

(Young girl, Southern Sudan)

Another key finding of our fieldwork was the endemic failures in the response to allegations of abuse when they had been officially reported. Anecdotal evidence from every one of the 38 focus groups consulted suggests that few reported allegations receive an adequate response. For example, few research participants had heard of the victim receiving medical, psychological or financial support, or of the perpetrator being adequately punished, if at all.

This is compounded by the slow rate of response documented by UN annual reports.[26] As Figure 6 demonstrates, of the 856 allegations of sexual misconduct towards adults and children made against DPKO, United Nations Volunteers (UNV), World Food Programme (WFP) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) between 2004 and 2006, only 324 had been resolved within the year in which they had been reported.[27] This leaves 532 allegations of abuse – 62% of the total – that had not been resolved within that same year.

Fig. 6: Numbers of resolved and unresolved cases of abuse of adults and children by UN staff between 2004 and 2006



Source: Annual reports of the UN Secretary-General's bulletin, *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* A/59/782 (15 April 2005); A/60/861 (24 May 2006); and A/61/957 (15 June 2007)

Our fieldwork identified a range of reasons why the response to allegations of abuse by agencies is so inadequate. These are linked to people either not wanting to take effective action or not being able to.

Firstly, the **international community is often left out of the response** to abuse altogether. Some beneficiaries described the response as a local matter for the individuals concerned and not for international organisations. This was particularly the case where the perpetrator was a local member of staff. Local judicial procedures are often applied using customary law, which is often more concerned with financial compensation to the family of the victim than in the best interests of the child. As a result, international organisations may not even be aware of the abuses, let alone respond to them. This is especially the case in Southern Sudan, where traditional rural communities often refer to customary law rather than to national legal procedures.

Local authorities can feel powerless to act against an international actor. In particular, local authorities struggle to pursue foreign perpetrators who leave the country before they can be prosecuted or even accused: *"An employee of* [an international organisation] *abused a girl. She told the police and they went after him but he had left the country so he went unpunished."* (Teenage boy, Haiti) This is compounded by existing obstacles in the international legal system that limit the possibility of successfully prosecuting a perpetrator once he has left the country. Furthermore, should the authorities in the country to which the perpetrator has moved choose to take action against them, it is often made difficult by the lack of evidence readily available. However, this problem may be addressed within a new international Memorandum of Understanding between troop-contributing countries.

The sense of powerlessness felt by local authorities is also linked with their **fear of the consequences of taking action**. Some local authorities fear physical retaliation from the perpetrator, especially if this individual is armed. Others fear jeopardising access to much-needed assistance: *"A girl was raped in 2006. She died. The government went to the community and said that they had to settle it quietly and that they didn't want anyone to cause any problems. The government talked to the parents of the girl that died and told them not to take any action. They were told that these people had come to help and not to kill."* (Teenage girl, Southern Sudan)

Local authorities can feel they are unable to collect sufficient evidence to pursue a case effectively. One government official in Côte d'Ivoire described deep frustration among the authorities, which, on several occasions, have been unable to prosecute known perpetrators because of insufficient evidence, due to a lack of cooperation and efficiency. If a case is not acted upon quickly, crucial evidence can be lost and victims can change their minds about making a complaint.

Many research participants referred to **an unwillingness to act** on the part of the local authorities and the international organisation concerned because they have other interests in common that could be affected. *"The people who are raping us and the people in the office are the same people."* (Young girl, Haiti) A few research participants in Haiti, including people from international organisations themselves, also referred to corruption between the international community and local authorities: *"Whether or not the government takes action against a person from a humanitarian or security organisation depends on who you are, where you work and whether or not the government is getting a cut."* (Aid worker) This has resulted in a chronic absence of accountability and a culture of impunity.

> *"They go walking around in the same areas every day and they don't even hide what they are doing. They don't care about the population; they just go and look for young girls every night. They use the hotel across from them and the school next to their camp."*
>
> (Adult beneficiary, Côte d'Ivoire)

> *"Many UN agencies and NGOs working here feel they cannot be touched by anyone."*
>
> (Aid worker, Côte d'Ivoire)

Some people seem **unaware of the need** to take action, or are satisfied with relatively ineffective responses. In particular, communities with a high incidence of gender discrimination do not see the need to seek out care and support services for girls who have experienced abuse, or only do so in cases of medical complications or pregnancy. This was especially true in the case of girls associated with coerced sexual abuse such as trading sex for food. Furthermore, in such circumstances participants described lenient disciplinary measures such as a verbal warning,

reassignment or *"advice on his mistake"* as the most appropriate way of handling a perpetrator of abuse.

Where communities do take action it can lead to **further violations of children's rights**. For example, in Southern Sudan early and forced marriage between the victim and the perpetrator is traditionally perceived as the best, and sometimes only, way of responding to abuse.

"The father would try to persuade the man to take the girl as a bride and to pay cattle for her. He would not ask the girl whether she wants this. So really the girl gets no advantage from telling anyone about the abuse."

"It is not good because it is a kind of abuse in itself. You have been abused by the man and then your parents abuse you again by trying to get the man to take you."

(Teenage girls, Southern Sudan)

9 What is the international community doing about it?

Save the Children commends the efforts of some UN agencies and NGOs to address this problem. It is not possible to list all initiatives taken, but below we describe a few that illustrate the commitment shown by many international organisations – even if, as this study shows, the impact has arguably yet to be seen at the grassroots level.

Several **interagency bodies** have been formed in connection with this issue. They include: Building Safer Organisations; the InterAction Task Force; the Executive Committees on Humanitarian Affairs and Peace and Security UN and NGO Task Force on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse; and the Keeping Children Safe Coalition.

Much attention has been paid to the development of **standards of conduct** expected of aid workers and peacekeepers, and to the appropriate response when abuse occurs. This has resulted most notably in the production of the UN Secretary-General's bulletin on *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*, as well as individual codes of conduct specific to each organisation.

Several UN agencies and NGOs have developed **guidance** for implementing these standards of conduct. This guidance includes the *Keeping Children Safe Toolkit*, developed in 2006 by a coalition of NGOs, including Save the Children UK, and several UN interagency toolkits for aid workers and peacekeepers, such as *Stop Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*.

Significant investment has been made in **communicating** information about this abuse and how to stop it among international organisations and beneficiary communities. For example, several UN agencies and NGOs have produced and disseminated information sheets, posters and videos.

Extensive **training** has been carried out among many international organisations. For example, Save the Children UK has conducted comprehensive training on its 'Safeguarding Children Policy' to all new and existing staff. Several organisations have also generated innovative training materials, including a UN interagency video: *To Serve with Pride*. BSO (now part of HAP-I) has conducted training on receiving and investigating allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers.

Most international organisations have developed their own **mechanisms and procedures** for reporting, monitoring and responding to complaints of abuse. Interagency procedures have also been established, including a peer review process in which Save the Children, Oxfam and ICRC conduct a collective review of each other's performance on this issue. The UN has also established its own interagency monitoring mechanisms led by the Office for Internal Oversight Services.

New **resources** have been created, including through the appointment of new UN and NGO staff to work on the ground to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse;

the deployment of female peacekeepers; and the establishment of Conduct and Discipline Teams within the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Finally, there have been several high-level **declarations of commitment** to eliminating this abuse. Most recently, all UN Agencies and many other international organisations, including Save the Children, signed up to a Statement of Commitment at a high-level conference in 2006. This is complemented by several resolutions by the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly.

Protection in practice: Case study of Save the Children UK's Child Protection Clubs in Southern Sudan

Save the Children UK is working to help communities tackle a variety of child protection problems in Southern Sudan.

As part of this work we support 16 children's clubs that reach out to more than 150 children in the local community. These children face many struggles, including early or forced marriage, and abduction, as well as sexual exploitation and abuse by staff associated with international organisations, and by local community members. Many children who have returned after years of displacement, child soldiering and separation from their families face the additional challenges of reintegrating into their communities.

The children's clubs provide training in children's rights and encourage members to actively participate in decision-making. Children are made aware of the risks they face and how to prevent and respond to them. Girls and boys work together to explore the problems they encounter and try to come up with solutions.

"The presence of the children's groups is acting as a major deterrent for abuse."

(Teenage boy, Southern Sudan)

The clubs also provide a much-needed safe space for children to play. Children are supported with organised sports and cultural activities, including traditional songs and dances that reconnect those who have returned with their communities and heritage. They have also visited other children's clubs, in different parts of the country, and brought greater understanding about the lives of children from different tribal areas.

To complement this work we assist Child Welfare Committees, consisting of parents and village leaders trained and supported to recognise sexual exploitation and abuse, and other child protection problems, and to refer these cases to the appropriate authority.

We are working alongside the government to document this work in order that it can be replicated elsewhere. In this way we hope to ensure that children and young people are empowered to claim their rights, and that parents, communities and authorities are supported to realise them.

10 Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that existing efforts to keep children safe from sexual exploitation and abuse are inadequate. There are three gaps, in particular, that are not being addressed satisfactorily. This section looks at these in more detail before exploring what can be done to resolve them.

First, children and adults are **not being adequately supported to speak out about the abuse against them**. Children, in particular, need effective services to help them report abuse. These services must be safe, confidential and easy to use, and must reach out to marginalised and excluded people, such as orphans, street children and minority ethnic groups. *"The biggest encouragement would be to make people feel safe to report."* (Teenage boy, Côte d'Ivoire) These services should be sensitive to social norms and values. Above all, they should be robust, act in the best interests of children, and be consistent with best-practice international standards and legal frameworks.[29]

> *"There needs to be a centre or a structure that is confidential and independent, that you know would take your report forward."*
>
> (Teenage girl, Côte d'Ivoire)

> *"Create a space where children get to know each other and can feel safe because even if children are scared to speak with parents, well maybe they will still speak with each other."*
>
> (Teenage girl, Haiti)

> *"If there was a society or organisation that we could go to directly and then they could take the problem forward and represent us then we would report it. In the heart of the community, if there were someone who could listen to our children and the child could receive counselling, that would be good."*
>
> (Adult woman, Côte d'Ivoire)

Secondly, **the international community is not exercising sufficiently strong leadership or managerial courage** on this issue. Senior managers within international institutions should make this an organisational priority, allocate more resources to it, and encourage staff to speak out when cases are identified. More needs to be done to actually implement policies. Procedures and guidance must be drawn up to curb abuse. Managers must also exercise rigour in the use of penal and disciplinary procedures. Perpetrators should be disciplined and not reassigned elsewhere. In addition, disciplinary action taken against abusers should be widely communicated to demonstrate a culture of 'zero tolerance' and an end to impunity. Staff should be better trained in children's rights and child protection.[28]

> *"Maybe if these people received training before they get here we can have an impact on this problem."*
>
> (Social worker, Côte d'Ivoire)

> *"Agencies should train people to talk about child rights."*
>
> (Teenage boy, Southern Sudan)

Finally, many of the underlying causes of this abuse point to an **acute lack of investment in child protection by governments and donors**. Alongside emergency relief efforts, there needs to be more sustained investment in tackling the root causes or drivers of child sexual exploitation and abuse. As our research has shown, some countries lack adequate laws or policies for dealing with this issue; orphans, children separated from their families and other vulnerable children often lack access to services that could prevent them from resorting to sex with the international community as a survival tactic; and the lack of functioning legal systems in fragile states creates a culture of impunity, where abuse goes on unhindered and unpunished.

What is child protection?

"Child protection work aims to prevent, respond to, and resolve the abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence experienced by children in all settings. It is a specialist sector in its own right, but of necessity works very closely with other sectors."

Extract from an internal International Save the Children Alliance document, *Save the Children and Child Protection*, 2007

Governments and donors must invest more in both short-term and long-term solutions. Many of these incidents of abuse take place in countries experiencing years of chronic fragility, and not just in those facing the immediate effects of conflict or a natural disaster. There is increasing recognition that the causes of, and the solutions to, many child protection problems, including sexual exploitation and abuse, are as relevant in these fragile contexts as they are in stable developing countries.[30]

"During the war very many people died. You can still find orphaned children who are at risk of abuse because they have no parents. They are poor and they look to sexual abuse to survive. This is why we need schools instead of leaving the girls to move around on their own. If they are in school and they have food, then they won't need to go outside looking for money. This is one thing that we can do in the community."

(Adult man, Southern Sudan)

11 Recommendations

Save the Children has developed three key recommendations intended to respond to the gaps in existing efforts, described above. They are based upon contributions from across the NGO, UN and public service sectors, as well from children, men and women in Southern Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and Haiti.[31] The recommendations are meant to complement and mutually reinforce other initiatives relating to sexual exploitation and abuse. They are, for now, proposals to inspire action and indicate where responsibility should lie. We are currently in the process of developing these ideas in collaboration with humanitarian and peacekeeping entities, and the countries they serve, in order to take these proposals forward.

Recommendations

- **Effective local complaints mechanisms** should be set up in country to enable people to report abuses against them.
- **A new global watchdog** should be established to monitor and evaluate the efforts of international agencies to tackle this abuse and to champion more effective responses.
- **Tackling the root causes or drivers of abuse** should become a greater priority for governments, donors and others in the international community, including the development of stronger child protection systems at the national level.

1 An effective local complaints mechanism for reporting abuse

Effective local complaints mechanisms should be established to help children and others in the community to speak out about the sexual exploitation and abuse against them. This should be a routine part of every emergency relief effort registered within the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

1.1

The UN country team should be responsible for setting up this mechanism. This team already exists in every emergency situation and contains the most senior representatives from individual UN agencies.[32] As the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse exists across all sectors, all UN agencies need to be involved in setting up this mechanism, not just those active in protection. This responsibility should be written into the terms of reference of every UN country team management structure and be reflected in their ongoing capacity-building work, as well as in individual responses. Although the responsibility to establish this mechanism may lie with the UN country team, it is critical that the national government, NGOs and the International Committee of the Red Cross be included in both its design and implementation.[33]

1.2

The complaints mechanism would have three main functions. It would:

- ensure a local and effective service is available for anyone in the community wishing to make a

complaint; this would include activities such as consulting with the communities on the most appropriate form of reporting
- ensure that an immediate and thorough investigation was undertaken by those responsible
- make sure that all possible action was taken to support the victim and to seek redress against the perpetrator.

1.3

The complaints mechanism would not in itself respond to allegations, but rather monitor and pursue the actions of others to ensure that the response was timely and effective. Where the allegation concerned a representative of the international community, the mechanism would ensure action was taken both by the employer and, where it has jurisdiction, by the local judicial system. Where the abuse concerned an ordinary local citizen, it would actively pursue the allegation through local mechanisms. Because these will often be unavailable or ineffective in emergencies or conflict-affected settings, the international organisations present should take whatever steps are necessary to either create or strengthen a minimum protection response (including legal, medical and other services).

1.4

These complaints mechanisms should be funded by donors. Bilateral and multilateral donors should earmark an additional percentage of all financing for peacekeeping and humanitarian work for this end.

1.5

The local complaints mechanisms should adhere to the following key practice standards:[34]
- They should be confidential and safe, recognising the many risks associated with reporting allegations in situations of extreme vulnerability.
- They should handle any complaint of sexual exploitation and abuse against children and adults, regardless of whether the perpetrator is a representative of an international organisation or from the local community.
- They should be available at the community level.
- They should be sensitive to the local context and should build upon positive local norms, values and structures.
- They should be easily accessible for children and young people, as well as reaching out to marginalised groups.
- Every effort should be made to collaborate with existing community and government structures.
- These mechanisms should also complement and build upon existing related monitoring bodies associated with the international community.[35]

1.6

The precise form of this local mechanism should fit with the local context. For example, in some communities it might be appropriate to establish a permanent physical space where children and others in the community can come to discuss these issues and to report allegations to dedicated focal points (persons). In others, it might only be necessary to establish a listening point where representatives from local and international organisations can share information about allegations they have received individually. Similarly, the housing of the mechanism will vary depending on the capacity of existing in-country services. For example, in fragile states, with few or no fully functioning government structures, this mechanism might be housed within an international agency.

1.7

The impact of this mechanism would be reflected in the quantity and quality of reporting services available at community level, as well as in the volume of people using them. We would also expect to see a rise in the number of allegations made immediately following the establishment of the mechanism, followed by a subsequent decrease to reflect a reduction in the level of abuse being committed. Annual progress reports should be compiled by each UN country team and submitted to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to form part of the UN Secretary-General's bulletin, *Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* as well as to the new global watchdog proposed in recommendation 2 (overleaf).

2 A new global watchdog

A watchdog is a proven method of quality control in other sectors. It could help motivate international organisations to prioritise this issue by acknowledging progress and exposing inadequacies. It would trigger the leadership and managerial courage needed to put policies and guidance into practice.

We are calling for the establishment of the watchdog by the end of 2008 at the latest. While we recognise that this watchdog should be developed and owned by the international community, we have identified the following key principles as a starting point:

2.1

We recommend that this watchdog be located within the existing Executive Committees on Humanitarian Affairs and Peace and Security UN and NGO Task Force on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (Task Force). This Task Force is a critical focal point for international action and already contains sound representation, expertise and dedication from a range of humanitarian, development and security UN agencies and NGOs.

2.2

The watchdog would have two main functions. First, it would monitor and evaluate the quality of efforts by Task Force members to stamp out this problem within their own organisations. For example, it would check that all members of the Task Force had appropriate child protection policies and procedures and assess to what degree they were being adhered to effectively.

Secondly, the watchdog would report back to the Task Force on progress made and the challenges encountered by its members in tackling this abuse. Emphasis would be placed on commending progress made by agencies, rather than just pointing to gaps. Potentially, an annual award could be designated to the agency that has achieved the best progress.

As part of this second function the watchdog would generate six-monthly assessment reports to be shared and discussed within the Task Force, as well as separate annual reports to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. These reports should include an assessment to show the performance of individual members of the Task Force in relation to different aspects of prevention and response. The first report to the UN Secretary-General should be made by the end of June 2009, and annually thereafter.

2.3

In order for the watchdog to fulfil these functions there would need to be a new level of transparency. UN agencies and NGOs would need to significantly increase their willingness to share:

- overall statistics on reported allegations of abuse and their response
- improvements to organisational systems of prevention and response
- other indicators of the size of the problem of child sexual exploitation and abuse by their staff and associates.

Task Force members should also assess the possibility of a peer review system. This would involve NGOs and UN agencies monitoring and evaluating each other's performance. Save the Children's own experiences of peer review with Oxfam and International Rescue Committee could provide a model for this initiative.

2.4

The impact of the watchdog would be reflected in the regular assessment reports, both internal to the Task Force and to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. We would also expect to see more rigorous reporting of allegations and their response by those UN agencies already obliged to publish this information within the Annual Reports of the UN Secretary-General's bulletin on *Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*.

2.5

All information shared within the Task Force would remain confidential in the first instance. However, in the long term, we hope that this would be a stepping-stone towards greater transparency and public accountability. By publishing data on allegations of abuse, and how they are responded to, international organisations would be open to evaluation by the general public, who they depend on for political and financial support.

The conduct of staff would become a measure of organisational performance, much in the way that good financial management is within current reporting procedures in many international agencies. Save the Children commends some UN agencies for the steps they have already taken along this road and hopes that all international organisations will move in this direction.

2.6

Donors should support the new watchdog with additional funding. In particular, the Humanitarian Affairs Department of the European Commission (ECHO), as one of the largest funders of humanitarian work, could be a key source of funding for this initiative. The UK, France, Canada, Italy and Belgium also have a demonstrable commitment to humanitarian and peacekeeping issues, including countering child sexual exploitation and abuse. They could, therefore, play an important role.

3 Tackling the root causes or drivers of abuse

To address the overall prevalence of child sexual exploitation and abuse in fragile states and emergencies, we need to think beyond the humanitarian and peacekeeping sector. As our research has shown, this abuse is inextricably linked with broader child protection failures embedded within the communities in which it occurs.

Governments, donors and financial institutions should invest more resources in longer-term solutions to the root causes or drivers of abuse.

A range of services and structures is required to keep children safe in what Save the Children terms a **child protection system**.[36] This approach is also advocated by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.[37] The form that a child protection system takes will naturally vary between countries according to the resources available and the priority given to different protection issues. However, there are some common components that need to be considered:

- **political commitment** to the protection of children in all settings, including homes, communities, schools, workplaces and institutions
- **budget allocations** to child protection services and mechanisms to ensure that they are adequately staffed and resourced
- **administrative representation** of child protection at all relevant levels, with clear leadership and well-defined responsibilities at each level, working according to guidelines and policies developed at the national level
- **protection services** that are easily accessible by children and adults at the community level. In particular, children, parents and others in the community must know about these services and what they can offer in the way of help, and have confidence that they will be effective
- the **coordination** of child protection services with other forms of support available from the health, education, social welfare and justice sectors, to ensure complementarity and to avoid duplication

What are child protection services?

Child protection services aim to prevent, respond to, and resolve the abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence experienced by children in all settings. They are specialist services discrete from the child protection sector but, of necessity, working very closely with other sectors.

They include, for example, medical, psychosocial and legal support to victims of violence and abuse; fostering and adoption of orphans; outreach work with street children to help them access livelihood, education and other support; awareness-raising and livelihood support to prevent unsafe child migration and trafficking; reuniting separated children with their families; reintegrating child soldiers and other children associated with fighting forces into their communities; establishing community care committees and other local services to help identify vulnerable children and help them to access support; income, social and other support to parents to enable them to provide and care for their children in a safe family environment.

- **legal reform and policy development**, to create the legislation, policies, codes, procedures and practice standards that generate behaviours necessary to keep children safe
- **capacity-building** programmes, dealing with themes such as children's rights and child protection legislation to enable all those involved, including teachers, law enforcement professionals, social workers, health professionals and employers, to recognise the signs of child abuse, and to know what to do next
- **public education and awareness-raising** initiatives, involving media, to create an informed, enlightened public who are aware of all aspects of violence against children, who can contribute actively with their own ideas and insights, and who can be important allies in tackling the problem
- **gender awareness and sensitisation**, to tackle discrimination associated with abuse. This should include work with boys and men to address dominant attitudes towards women, as well as work to strengthen the social status of women and girls
- a **national research programme**, to generate much better information on the scale and nature of child protection problems and to provide robust evidence on successful approaches to challenge those problems
- the **active involvement of children** in the development and implementation of a national protection system, to ensure its credibility and applicability. This includes support for the work of child-led groups and organisations that are created to combat violence against children
- **partnership** between government and civil society, including NGOs, community-based organisations, parents and childcare professionals, to complement the work of government in fulfilling children's right to protection.

Endnotes

Glossary

[1] This is taken from the agreed definition laid out in the UN Secretary-General's bulletin, *Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse*, ST/SGB/2003/13, 9 October 2003.

[2] See note 1.

1 Introduction

[3] Protection rights are enshrined within the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC), the UN Declaration of Human Rights and universal humanitarian standards.

[4] For more information on the links between child sexual abuse and exploitation committed by the local and international community, see Save the Children UK, *From Camp to Community, Liberia study on exploitation of children*, 2006. For more information on child sexual abuse committed more broadly, see Save the Children Norway, *Listen and Speak out against Sexual Abuse of Girls and Boys: 10 Essential Learning Points*, Global Submission by the International Save the Children Alliance to the UN Study on Violence against Children, 2005.

2 Methodology

[5] See note 4.

3 How are children being abused?

[6] For the purposes of this study, 'young' refers to a boy or girl aged between 10 and 14 years.

[7] The age of sexual consent varies around the world. For example, in India the age is 18, while in Mexico it is 12. The most common age of consent worldwide is 16. However, the UNCRC states that any person under the age of 18 is entitled to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

4 Who is it happening to?

[8] For the purposes of this study, 'teenage' refers to a boy or girl aged between 15 and 17 years.

5 Who are the abusers?

[9] UN annual reports of the Secretary-General's bulletin, *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* A/59/782 (15 April 2005); A/60/861 (24 May 2006); and A/61/957 (15 June 2007).

[10] See note 9.

[11] This is further explored in S Martin, *Boys Must be Boys? Ending Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in UN Peacekeeping Missions*, Refugees International, 2005.

[12] See note 11.

[13] Save the Children UK, *From Camp to Community, Liberia Study on Exploitation of Children*, Save the Children UK, 2006.

6 What is the scale of abuse?

[14] See note 13.

[15] K Holt and S Hughes, 'Sex and Death in the Heart of Africa,' *Independent*, 25 May 2004.

[16] A MacKay, 'Sex and the Peacekeeping Soldier: The New UN Resolution,' *Peace News*, June 2001.

[17] E Barth, 'The United Nations Mission in Eritrea/Ethiopia: Gender(ed) Effects' in L Olsson *et al* (eds) *Gender Aspects of Conflict Interventions: Intended and Unintended Consequences*, Oslo International Peace Research Institute, 2004.

[18] C Lynch, 'Misconduct, Corruption by US Police Mar Bosnia Mission,' *Washington Post*, 29 May 2001.

[19] S Martin, *Boys Must be Boys? Ending Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in UN Peacekeeping Missions*, Refugees International, 2005.

[20] Wider NGO data on trends and incidences on allegations of abuse are not publicly available at present.

[21] These figures are taken from the UN annual reports of the Secretary-General's bulletin, *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* A/59/782 (15 April 2005); A/60/861 (24 May 2006); and A/61/957 (15 June 2007). It should be noted that the figures for DPKO for 2006 are particularly low since only 82 of the 357 new allegations made were investigated in that same year, and only five of those investigated were confirmed with children.

[22] While there are 111 UN entities in total, only 41 of these were requested to report on sexual exploitation and abuse in the UN Secretary-General's bulletin, *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* A/61/957 (15 June 2007).

[23] UN Secretary-General's bulletin, *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* A/61/957 (15 June 2007).

7 Why is abuse under-reported?

[24] This is further explored in Save the Children UK, *From Camp to Community: Liberia study on exploitation of children*, Save the Children UK, 2006.

[25] Only 25 of the 38 groups were asked this question.

8 Why are allegations of abuse not properly responded to?

[26] Unfortunately, there is no comparable data for NGOs.

[27] These figures are taken from the UN annual reports of the Secretary-General's bulletin, *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* A/59/782 (15 April 2005); A/60/861 (24 May 2006); and A/61/957 (15 June 2007).

10 Conclusion

[28] Save the Children recognises and commends the work of Building Safer Organisations and HAP International to build capacity on this issue within the humanitarian sector.

[29] For example, the mechanism should comply with the UNCRC, and with the NGO and Red Cross Code of Conduct for Humanitarians, and international humanitarian law.

[30] International Save the Children Alliance, *Why Effective National Child Protection Systems are Needed*, International Save the Children Alliance, 2006.

11 Recommendations

[31] These recommendations draw on contributions from sector professionals across many UN agencies, NGOs and interagency bodies, as well as desk-based research into existing watchdog services operated by government ombudsmen in Norway, Denmark, Sweden and the UK.

[32] Peacekeeping entities should be incorporated into this group, if they are not already represented.

[33] The Humanitarian and Development Partnership Team being piloted in the Central African Republic could be a model for joint work on this issue. For more information see http://hdptcar.net/blog/

[34] Save the Children UK recognises the valuable work done by Building Safer Organisations to develop practice standards for complaints mechanisms.

[35] For example, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism created by UN Security Council resolution 2005/1612 and the work of the Humanitarian Accountability Project.

[36] See note 30.

[37] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Conclusion on Children at Risk*, 2007.

No One to Turn To

The under-reporting of child sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers and peacekeepers

Children living in countries affected by conflict and natural disaster are being sexually exploited and abused by the very people hired to help them – aid workers and peacekeepers. Almost as shocking is the general silence surrounding the abuse. Children and their families are not speaking out because of fear and powerlessness. And international organisations are failing to respond effectively to allegations of abuse levelled against them.

No One to Turn To seeks to move the debate on and reinvigorate efforts to address this appalling problem. Based on research with communities and international organisations, it examines the chronic under-reporting of abuse and the inadequate response to it. It provides new analysis on why this abuse persists despite international efforts to stop it, and proposes new solutions to tackle it.

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