

Education: A force for change¹

I. INTRODUCTION

In the brothels of Manila and Nairobi on the streets of Rio and New York, in the bars of Amsterdam and Bangkok, in buses, railway stations, hotel rooms in all parts of the world, millions of children² are at risk of commercial sexual exploitation or already caught in the mega-dollar sex industry.

Children sacrificed to the abuse of power by unthinking and unscrupulous adults; children subjected to violence and serious health hazards; their right to education and all other rights denied; their childhood itself and all aspects of their development undermined; their life prospects severely curtailed. These are the tragic and ugly manifestations of neglect and failure of societies, communities and governments to deal with the widespread problem of children trapped in the sex trade.

The educational system is society's instrument to equip children with adequate and appropriate skills and knowledge to fulfill their potential and meet life's responsibilities. Education is a vehicle for transmitting to the next generation, the values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and norms considered important by a society; it is also a tool for social transformation. Failure in educational systems feature prominently in perpetuating the practice of commercial sexual exploitation of children; effective education, therefore, must be an important element in its elimination. What are the possibilities and limits of education in combating the sexual exploitation of children? What can be done to enhance its positive role? These are the questions addressed in this paper.

II. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a complex and multi-faceted problem that includes economic, social, cultural and political determinants. Poverty caused by economic disparities and the absence of opportunities for families and young people are major villains in the drama. Social and cultural values and norms of behaviour sometimes foster the indifference toward, even acquiescence of grievous assaults on children. Many legal systems and their enforcement mechanisms fail to deter injustice or protect children from criminal acts committed against them. Systems of governance often deny a voice to the very sectors of society who need most to be heard -- those affected by exploitation and inequality. Education, itself affected by the interplay of social forces, must therefore, become an instrument of change with a major role in preventing, reducing, and eventually eliminating this practice.

It has been convincingly argued that organized schooling in formal or nonformal programmes constitute a tiny fraction of human learning. The major bulk of education and certainly the most enduring part happens through interaction with one's social and physical environment. This learning through life has been described as *informal* learning in contrast to organized learning through *formal* and *nonformal* educational programmes.³

Education in its widest sense happens by circumstance or by design. Children learn more from how they are treated than from what they are taught, and that learning can foster or impede a child's healthy development. Education is the creation and building of values and attitudes, skills, beliefs, and behaviours. Children's understanding of themselves and their world is shaped by relationships with important adults and peers in their lives, through role models, observation and instruction.

Children internalize the lessons they are taught at home, in school, on television and radio, in churches and mosques --as well as on the street, in railway and bus stations, bars and brothels. And what are the lessons that children caught in commercial sex are learning? That adults are not trustworthy; that children, especially girls are viewed

primarily as property, valued for their short-term economic gain; that decision-making is the privilege of those who have power; and that money, status and possessions are often worth more than dignity, self-respect and even sometimes life, itself.

Who are the teachers of those victimized by commercial sexual exploitation? These children learn most directly from the abuse of sex exploiters themselves, the customers, the traffickers, pimps, brothel owners and all those who buy and sell, earn money from or pay to have sex with children. But these perpetrators could not exist without the explicit or implicit complicity of society at large -- and of those adults responsible for the nurturing, protection, and development of children -- families, teachers, health professionals and other service providers, law enforcement officials, religious and community leaders, the media, policy makers and the public at large.

The challenge for education is two-fold. *First*, how can the educational system, working in synergy with other social institutions, become a proactive force for social change? The aim of this collaboration is to ensure a change in attitude and practice by all social institutions and systems that will engender protection, respect and promotion of the humanity, dignity and rights of children. *Second*, how can the educational system counteract the negative impact and reinforce the empowering and enabling lessons of informal learning? Formal or nonformal educational programmes are not sufficient as they stand, even for those children who are already attending school.

Education is not a panacea, nor will educational measures alone suffice to combat the depredation of children in the sex trade. At the same time, no effort to address the problem will be workable or sustainable without them. This paper will show that the educational system can and should contribute far more to the solution than it has done to date.

There is something grossly wrong when children and adolescents, instead of attending school and other educational institutions, instead of being nurtured in an environment of care and affection, are deprived of their right to education and forced to live under the shadow of threat, violence and humiliation. Education, in partnership with other instruments or with society, must be used to redress this wrong.

III. A FRAMEWORK OF EDUCATIONAL ACTION TO COMBAT THE COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

Education, at its best, is an empowering tool for children, enabling them to develop the necessary confidence, self-esteem, capacity for reasoning and social skills to protect their rights and dignity and to become productive, fully participating adult members of society. Successful education can also enable adults whose role is to nurture, care for and educate children to understand and act upon their continuing and changing responsibility in shaping the development of children. And when designed and carried out purposefully, education can create and build the commitment of society as a whole to respect the rights and dignity of its children.

1. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Any educational approach to commercial sexual exploitation should be based firmly on the letter and the spirit of the Convention. An expression of international consensus on the norms and standards of behaviour of societies towards their children, the Convention spells out obligations of society and the state regarding all children. Its ratification by 187 states to-date signals a global commitment to recognize and protect all rights for all children. This near universal acceptance represents a unique opportunity for aggressive advocacy and awareness-raising on behalf of children. As the first step to change, awareness raising needs to be accompanied by the design and development of mechanisms that create the possibilities for families and children to find and choose better opportunities.

The Convention is a relevant framework for educational action: It underscores the links between commercial sexual exploitation and various violations of rights; it establishes fundamental principles and guidelines for thinking about and acting on the fulfillment of rights; and the rights of participation by children in decisions affecting their lives has particular relevance to education.

The Convention also presents a framework for action, guiding us to strategies that combine the rights of children to be “protected from” with their rights to be “provided with”. For the Convention recognizes that all children are not equally vulnerable to violation of rights and that special measures are required for the protection and fulfillment of the rights of those children in especially difficult circumstances. Most rights of children in commercial sexual exploitation are being breached, the right to education among them. Could enabling these children to exercise their right to education facilitate their access to other rights?

Yes--if educational strategies recognize the principle of indivisibility--that no single article or group of articles can be viewed in isolation from the others; they must all be viewed together. Education needs to be accompanied by complementary measures, i.e. legislation, new policies, health programmes, alternative economic opportunities and the commitment to a change in values in attitudes.

Yes--if the best interests of the child is the central principle for devising strategies in accordance with the rights and obligations of parents, teachers, legal guardians and all relevant legislative and administrative measures.

Yes--if children, depending on their developmental stage, are active participants in the decision making process about measures that affect their well-being. The principle of participation, expressed in Article 12 of the Convention, adds a new dimension to the adult world's interaction with children. Only if the adults in a child's life pay full respect to her/his judgements and views considering age and degree of maturity, can the child become a real participating member of society. In the educational process, then, young people must be seen as resources rather than victims; their resilience, strength and opinions respected and relied on.

2. An International Commitment

The *World Conference on Education for All* held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, the world community pledged to take the necessary steps to achieve primary education for all children by the end of the decade. Jomtien also articulated an “expanded vision” of universal basic education that went beyond access and enrolment to the quality and relevance of learning as a tool for empowerment. The Jomtien goals have become a benchmark for subsequent international expressions of social development goals; notably those of the World Summit for Children (1990), the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the World Summit for Social Development (1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995).

Commercial sexual exploitation of children is only now being placed on the global agenda, and forging a link with education, for prevention and recovery, is a new endeavor. The World Congress in Stockholm represents an awakening and a commitment to raise awareness and take action against the commercial sexual exploitation of children. At the heart of this commitment lies education aimed at changing attitudes and behaviours that will move society irrevocably in the direction of eliminating this disabling practice.

3. Educational Objectives

Given the role of education in promoting social change, what should be its priorities and purposes in relation to combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children? They can be seen from two interlinked perspectives 1) developing the main objectives for designing and implementing educational programmes; and 2) identifying the major categories of learners who must be reached.

- To prevent or at least reduce the risk of children falling prey to commercial sex by ensuring their access to and participation in education;
- To promote and respect the rights of children through relevant content and methods in educational programmes;
- To enable children through specially designed educational measures and the process of recovery to become reintegrated into their families and communities when appropriate.
- To enhance the skills, understanding and knowledge of relevant and responsible adults regarding the circumstances of children involved in commercial sex and of those who are vulnerable; and
- To support awareness-raising, advocacy and social mobilization among the public at large about the scope, nature and impact of commercial sexual exploitation of children and the need for action.

4. Categories of Learners

- Children of school age, whether out-of-school, in-school, or currently in the sex trade (and more likely to be out-of-school). The design of programmes should take into account the many relevant differences in needs and behaviours, ages and stages of development; differences between boys and girls; children in rural, urban and varying cultural environments; children who have been coerced and those who have entered the sex industry without physical coercion;
- Specific groups of adults and institutions whose role is the nurturing and protection and education of children. This includes families and service providers (teachers, health professionals, law enforcement officials, legislators, NGOs, etc.)
- The public at large--citizens, policy makers and “opinion leaders”, with a focus on the tourist and travel industry, and including those who influence the public such as the media, religious, community, and mass organizations such as trade unions and organizations of youth and women.

The challenge in defining categories of learners is to remain focused on those who most need and can most benefit from educational programmes, without losing sight of the interlinking of populations and objectives in developing coherent, comprehensive and holistic strategies. For example, the reintegration of children into families and communities may necessitate the education of many groups--children, families, teachers, health professionals, religious and community leaders, policy makers and whole communities.

IV. EDUCATION STRATEGIES AND MEASURES

Commercial sexual exploitation of children affects primarily adolescents, a population that usually falls between the cracks of public policies. It is intimately related to the most sensitive and taboo subjects of sexuality, domestic violence, and adolescent pregnancy, which have, until recently, remained private, or family matters and not the business of governments, the international community, or educational programmes.

In its detrimental impact on a child’s development, commercial sexual exploitation also has much in common with other especially difficult circumstances and forms of exploitation, such as child labour, organized violence, incest and sexual abuse within the home. All children exposed to such circumstances require special measures which protect them from the damaging consequences, remedy the harm inflicted, offer better opportunities, and provide children and families with the skills to take advantage of those opportunities.

The conceptual framework of educational objectives, learner populations, and guiding principles for action provide

the foundation for developing strategies and programmes to help combat the sexual exploitation of children. To reach all children -- those in danger of or are already subjected to the gross violation of rights, two overall approaches are necessary:

- mainstreaming of measures within general educational programmes for all children;
- specially-targeted programmes for those who are poorly-served or unreachable by mainstream efforts.

Article 29 of the CRC...the education of the child shall be directed to the development of: her/ his personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; respect for the child's parents, his or her own culture identity, language and values; and the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all peoples...

Expansion of educational access and participation for all children including those potentially or actually victims of sexual exploitation and steps to enhance the quality and relevance of educational content are clearly mainstream measures. Programmes specifically designed for children entrapped in a situation of exploitation are obviously special measures outside the mainstream.

There is also a need for cross-sectoral collaboration, using many educational methods and measures from awareness raising to training, that will involve families, teachers, providers of social services, and other relevant adults in the educational process. Educational strategies for advocacy and social mobilization are needed to support measures to combat sexual exploitation of children. These different strategies are described below.

1. Expanding Access and Participation

Children in school are less likely to be exploited than children not in school, although sometimes school children are involved in the sex trade to earn the cash needed for school fees, books and uniforms and transportation. On the whole, participation in primary and secondary education is a means of reducing the vulnerability of children to exploitation and thus a critical part of prevention.

Article 28 of CRC...States Parties recognise the right of the child to education...shall...a) make primary education compulsory and available free to all; b) encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child...

At least 130 million children today do not have access to primary education. Another 100 million do not complete a full cycle. Education beyond the primary level is not generally a part of the universal basic education plan in developing countries, although a majority of the children involved in commercial sex are of secondary school age. According to a UNESCO estimate, close to 300 million adolescents beyond the primary school stage are out of school.⁴ Two-thirds of those are girls and a large majority belong to the poor and disempowered sectors of society including ethnic and cultural minorities -- those most vulnerable to exploitation of all forms.

1.1. Closing the Gender Gap

The persistent gender gap in education both in quantitative and qualitative terms, undoubtedly is linked to the fact that girls comprise the majority of children at risk of and involved in commercial sex. Despite the growing worldwide effort to improve access to education for girls, drop-out rates remain high in many countries and the inequality in attitudes and treatment in the classroom continues. The safety and security of girls and their protection

from sexual molestation in school and on their way to school itself is an issue in many countries. The development of a conducive learning environment that ensures retention and completion of girl learners in an educational system, that will enhance their life aspirations, and raise their performance expectations and actual achievement, remains a major problem and a necessary objective.

A collaborative effort between teachers and administrators in the educational system and the community at large including parents, governments administrators, and leaders of the civil society is needed to remove the cultural, economic and social barriers both within and outside the classroom to girls' full participation in education. To this end, UNICEF has embarked on a major initiative with governments, other agencies and international NGOs.

Ensuring participation of adolescents, especially girls, in education remains an unfinished job. Experience has shown that diversified and flexible approaches within an overall unified system are needed to reach the population groups deprived of education. Especially innovative programmes are needed for girls and other disenfranchised groups. One approach which addresses holistically girls of secondary school age and mostly ethnic minorities is the grassroots programme, run by Daughters' Education Programme (DEP) in Northern Thailand.

2. Enhancing Relevance and Quality of Learning Content and Methods

The Jomtien Declaration on Education for All and Articles 28 and 29 of the CRC have defined universal education in terms of enrolment in educational programmes, the acquisition of basic competencies and learning achievements, and preparation for responsible life in a free society. Particularly important in the context of preventing and combating sexual exploitation of children is the emphasis on life skills and learning about rights in the content and methodology of educational programmes. It is widely recognized that a broad range of life skills -- problem-solving, judgement, negotiation, concentration and persistence, self-confidence, trust in oneself and in others, and identification with one's own culture accompanied by respect for the culture of others -- is critical to furthering a child's development and to fostering her/his well-being.

However, many educational systems struggling to ensure mere access for all children consider it a luxury to aim for anything beyond a basic curriculum. The *basic* usually turns out in practice to be the acquisition of a body of factual information based on rote memorization. The information itself is often irrelevant to the life of the child. Yet, it has been demonstrated that development of life skills and learning for realizing one's potential are possible at low cost when these are taken as specific objectives.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is generally seen as an advocacy tool for expansion of educational opportunities for children, but its full meaning for the content and methods of education has not received sufficient attention. Knowing about the rights, understanding the Convention's principles and spirit, and practicing and exercising the rights in the classroom and in the educational system should become an integral feature of the educational process. This includes direct use of the provisions of the Convention such as rights-based standards of discipline, non-discrimination in the classroom, reviewing and enriching the syllabus, and ensuring a voice and genuine participation of children in their own learning.

Of the 43 countries which have submitted national reports on implementation of the CRC to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 13 have built the Convention into the educational curricula or school courses. El Salvador, Portugal, and Sri Lanka, for instance, have included materials on the rights of the child in their primary and secondary education programmes. In 1991, Denmark launched a campaign to convey the principles of the Convention to the public and materials on child rights were distributed to students from the first to the tenth grades. Chile set up in 1994 an institution called the "Defender of School Children" to deal with children's complaints against school authorities.⁵ Student participation in management of classrooms, student activities, disciplinary system, and overall management of the institution is practiced in educational programmes guided by a progressive and democratic vision of education.

Every person - child youth and adult - shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet (his or her) basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, numeracy and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their intellectual capacities, to live and work in dignity, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and culture, and inevitably changes with the passage of time. (Article 1, World Declaration on Education for All)

3. Reaching Outside the Schoolroom into the Community

While improving access to and quality of education can be a preventive leverage, there is also a great need for schools to address commercial sexual exploitation more directly as it affects the lives of children. The strong resistance of families, teachers and administrators in some places combined with the fact that the majority of children endangered by commercial sexual exploitation are beyond primary school age, makes school outreach-when possible - even more urgent. Reaching into communities, schools can become effective as a safe and supportive environment in which children and families can explore the sensitive and often taboo subjects of sexuality, HIV/AIDS, unwanted teenage pregnancies, drugs, as well as the development of self and mutual respect and parenting skills for both boys and girls. The urgent need for sexuality and reproductive health education has been expressed by many NGOs and other activists in developing countries; they are also frustrated by the strong resistance to its incorporation in some curricula or extra-curricula school programmes. In South Africa, where sexuality education is required by law, it is often blocked by headmasters, teachers, administrator and families.⁶

Collaborative initiatives between UNICEF, governments and NGOs have resulted in the development of a range of school-based interventions for youth health and development. These initiatives are an effort to raise awareness about the physical, psychosocial and economic needs of youth, a crucial segment of the population that is often ignored or pushed aside out of fear or a sense of helplessness by adults.

In addition to providing specific health information and skills, these programmes attempts to help young people learn about the realities of sex, including the associated pleasures, dangers and responsibilities, and how to handle their emotional needs and responses to competing peer and family pressures.⁷

The HIV/AIDS crisis has motivated a plethora of programmes in many countries that are the kinds of school-based, non-academic educational programmes directly applicable to the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children and excellent models with which to address this issue. These include school health clubs, health and family life education, life skills education.

4. Targeted Programmes for Children Outside the Reach of School Programmes, Including those Currently Engaged in Commercial Sex

Children who work and/or live on the street often include those who are being sexually exploited and unlikely to participate in regular school programmes. These children have either dropped out of school or have never been enrolled. Their age and circumstances make it unlikely that they would fit in with other school children or that the school programme would respond to their particular social, cultural, emotional and learning needs.

Children involved in the sex trade are often in a coercive situation and cannot leave without legal, psychological and social support. Others who may not be under physical coercion, but see no other options in life also need a great deal of help and encouragement to seek out and strive for other alternatives. Those who have left the sex trade on their own or with help from government social services, non-governmental organizations, or friends and relatives,

continue to need support, empathy and assistance to be re-integrated into society and find new meaning and purpose in life.

Targeted and specially-designed programmes for these children need to be more than educational in the traditional sense. Because of their entrapment in an illicit and vicious situation, these children have fallen out of the support system of family, community and society they are expected and entitled to enjoy. To help them, replacement of the lost social support system has to be reconstructed. Educational programmes, therefore, have to combine the essential elements of conventional basic education such as literacy and numeracy with other forms of social support such as psychological counseling and rebuilding of self-esteem, shelter, health and maternity service, child care and legal advice and protection. Such programmes also need to be complemented or followed by training in occupational skills and advice.

With increased concern about the vulnerability and exploitation of children, programmes have been started in many parts of the world mostly by NGOs and other voluntary organizations. The common features of these programmes provide valuable guides for strategies to help children victimized by commercial sex. They are:

- multi-purpose and multi-disciplinary in nature combining traditional educational components with relevant support services;
- initiated and managed by non-governmental organizations including religious and community organizations whose flexibility, creativity and sensitive approach can lend a comparative advantage to the voluntary sector;
- small-scale, tailored to the needs of specific groups in particular circumstances, while following certain common approaches and principles;
- focused in the educational content on urgent and practical concerns such as issues of sexuality, teenage pregnancy, drugs, violence, and response to peer, family and other social pressures;
- dealing with the realities of life; the educational programme has to be cognizant of the harsh realities and painful experiences that the children have lived through; life skills rather than accumulation of facts are especially at premium;
- concerned with income-earning skills and opportunities; poverty and absence of economic opportunities for the children and their families that drove the children into vulnerability and exploitation in the first place have to be addressed by offering them new options;
- concerned with creating a supportive environment for and working with families to change their own situations in ways that benefit children; one of the main conclusions of a 1994 Latin American Seminar was the need to work with the families, especially in others, as well as girls who are or have been engaged in commercial sex.⁸

5. Education for Relevant Adults

Adults with a role in the nurturing, protecting and participation in the healthy development of children have a special responsibility. For they are the direct teachers and role models of children, in the home, in the classroom and in the larger world, including the police station and courtroom where so many children in commercial sex wind up. For adults to accept their ongoing responsibility towards the developing child, to become proactive partners and social change agents they need first to understand the harmful impact of commercial sexual exploitation on children and society and to become aware of their own contributing attitudes and behaviours.

5.1 Families

Educational efforts need to be directed toward helping families understand the link between economic burdens and values, to understand the impact of their behaviour on their children and to assist them in changing their own situations. For this they need access to credit, alternative means of earning income, and the skills and knowledge to use these opportunities to protect and benefit themselves and their children.

5.2 Teachers

Teachers are often powerful influences in children's lives. At the same time, they can mirror unthinking social attitudes and behaviours and even the most dedicated and committed are often powerless in a system that holds them in low regard. For most work under enormous stress, are poorly paid, lack the support, respect or understanding they are expected to give to children. Even in education reform efforts, teacher education has been largely neglected and only small percentages of financial support have been devoted to pre- or in-service teacher education.⁹ World Bank research on successful reform programmes demonstrated that such training was one of the three most critical interventions.

5.3 Service Providers

Initiatives in public health clinics are sometimes reported to be reluctant to serve street children, although resistance is reportedly often greater among support staff and nurses.¹⁰ In addition, many social workers, NGOs and others who provide services to children in difficult circumstances, find their effectiveness impeded by their own frustrations, judgements and powerlessness in the face of difficult and resistant behaviours and attitudes of street girls, in particular those who are or have been in prostitution. They may engage in attempts to "reform" young men and women involved in commercial sex, or get them to "change their ways" without listening, understanding, helping them to develop life and vocational skills that enable them to make their own decisions about whether or not to change their behaviour. As a result, many youth services are underutilized because some providers have judgmental attitudes, especially with regard to reproductive services.¹¹

Because the appropriate place of these professionals is at the forefront of enlightened, supportive and non-judgmental behaviour and of social mobilization and advocacy, it is particularly important that they become social actors in support of children's rights beginning with their own behaviour.

Training workshops that raise awareness of service providers about their own attitudes can lead to the development of user-friendly and accessible educational services with outreach to the hard-to-reach, reluctant populations of the young. Agencies whose programmes include income generation and vocational skills development need themselves to be trained about the relevancy and appropriateness of their training.

5.4 Law Enforcement Officials

Of special concern is the direct and indirect complicity of police and other officials of the legal system with a special responsibility for creating and enforcing laws that protect children and respect their rights. Police and courtroom personnel from judges to prosecutors need to learn that treating children as offenders and/or adults is not only contrary to the CRC and many national laws, but counterproductive.

They need the skills and tools of specially-trained personnel to create a supportive, child-friendly environment in police stations, courtrooms or at borders where trafficked children may find themselves isolated and in danger. Police could (and should) play a pivotal educational and supportive role in prevention, protection and rehabilitation. As role models, they can also help children learn their rights and find ways to leave prostitution. In some countries, for example, Peru, NGOs and others are developing programmes for police training in child rights; in Nepal, police units are working in tandem with the NGO Maiti, UNESCO and UNICEF in a multi-dimensional programme which offers education and support to deter families from selling their children to traffickers.

6. Education of the Public and Social Mobilization

A measure of accountability lies with all sectors of society for the existence and continuation of commercial sexual exploitation of children. In addition to those mentioned in the previous section, this includes religious and community leaders who may view adolescents as immoral or uncontrollable, travel and tourist personnel who do not think about the ramifications of having sex with children, policy makers and legislators who believe that making pronouncements and passing laws are the limit of their responsibility; the public who sees the problem as somebody else's.

Education of the public, primarily through the media, has been used successfully in many areas of social action, worldwide -- in family planning, anti-smoking campaigns, use of condoms, hotlines for battered women, breast-feeding campaigns. It can also be used to prevent and help the process of recovery and reintegration for children endangered by commercial sexual exploitation. Education as social mobilization involves wide use of and partnership with a wide range of the communication media to learn about the magnitude and impact of the problem and to propagate messages -- as television "entertainment" dramatizing the plight and rescue of a young girl sold into the sex industry; as radio or print messages warning of trafficking techniques in rural villages; as articles in travel or airline magazines; as informational brochures or pamphlets in hotel lobbies and rooms warning of the illegality of sex with a child.

Education for social mobilization begins with an assessment -- who do we want to reach? How do we want to reach them? What is the appropriate and desired message? And what is the best medium for the audience? It must take into account the relationship between the communication capacity and the responsiveness of the social environment.

Who Should Be Reached?

- *Policy-makers, legislators, parliamentarians, tourists, business travelers, tourist agencies, airline and hotel personnel, police, religious and community leaders, teachers, professionals, service providers, and children.*

What Social Attitudes must Change?

- *that children, especially girls, are property and economic commodities;*
- *that children are to blame for their own circumstances;*
- *that sex with a very young girl cures or prevents AIDS, rejuvenates old men, brings riches, etc.;*
- *indifference, ignorance and/or denial of the problem and its consequences;*
- *shame about or fear of adolescent sexuality;*
- *frustration or disgust at a child's "unresponsive" "disobedient" "out of control" behaviour*

What Behaviours and Actions Are Desired?

- *creation of a supportive social environment and services such as hotlines, rescue or counseling center;*
- *creation of a demand for improved access to and quality of education;*
- *creation of family and community groups to act as watchdogs against traffickers;*
- *creation of family or community support for children in the sex industry to return to their homes;*
- *support for parents at risk of selling their children;*
- *consistency between public words and private deeds;*
- *pressure policy-makers and legislators to make a serious commitment to implementing the CRC.*

What Attitudes Are Desired?

- *sex with a child is unacceptable;*
- *children are not for sale;*
- *all children are human beings whose rights deserve to be respected;*
- *girls have the same value as boys;*
- *sexual exploitation causes serious, often permanent, physical and psychological damage;*
- *a child who has been in the sex industry should not be stigmatised, but deserves love, support and respect.*

FROM STRATEGIES TO ACTION: THE NEXT STEPS

1. Action at the Country Level

The strategies described in this paper need to be adapted into a coherent package in a country setting. The specific mix of priorities, objectives and activities will vary depending on the particular dimensions of the national problem. Assessment of the needs and magnitude of the problem has to be based on a diagnostic analysis of the situation, preferably as a collaborative effort¹² among all principal actors in the country on issues of children's well-being. Other critical measures include the following:

1.1. Building Partnerships

Neither the NGOs which are often the activists in respect to commercial sexual exploitation of children, nor the government alone can solve the problems. A partnership must be developed to tackle the range of preventive and remedial efforts among government authorities at different levels, national and international NGOs, research and training institutions, community groups, communications media, business and external donors.

1.2. Creating a Network of Non-Governmental Organizations

Frontline work with children in the sex trade or those at risk is being carried out by NGOs and community-based organizations, many of which are very small. Such organizations are often created by caring individuals who receive initial support from charitable, religious or welfare bodies. Combined efforts will have a larger impact and greater sustainability than any individual effort; coalitions need to be supported and recognised as a permanent and important feature of a national programme for combating the problem. To achieve these ends, it is necessary for the

NGOs to work together to pool skills, enhance capacities, and, in particular, to interact with government and municipal authorities.

1.3. Giving Children a Voice

Apart from the general right of children to participate in decisions that affect them, programmes are more likely to succeed, when children and youth are allowed to articulate their own views and concerns regarding their difficult circumstances. This may mean encouraging cultural activities such as theatre, singing festivals, and exhibitions by youth groups and institutions. Opportunities for advocating their own cause by children and youth have to be built into all programmes and in such initiatives as “Mayors as Defenders of Children”.

1.4. Research

Research, and the development of research tools should be an essential part of action aimed at protecting exploited and vulnerable children. Not enough is known about the extent and nature of the problem in different social, cultural, economic and political settings. Children’s downward progression from circumstances that place them at risk into involvement in an exploitative situation is not often understood. Research institutes, statistical bureau and NGOs are important partners in action-oriented and participatory research, which can fill the gap in knowledge -- essential for designing effective programmes and evaluating them.

2. Global Advocacy It is undeniable that in the context of chauvinistic defensiveness and denial on the sensitive subject of children in commercial sex, international exposé, debate and advocacy have helped to influence public policy and change attitudes. These international and regional efforts have to continue, especially in re-orienting mainstream educational systems and developing creative programmes with a targeted approach. However, all advocacy must be conducted in such a way that children are not harmed by sensationalism or insensitive exposure. Thoughtless messages that imply connections between abusive and exploitative circumstances and particular ethnic or cultural groups may reinforce negative stereotypes about members of those minority groups, adding to their stigmatization and exclusion.

2.1. Promoting National and Local Capacity-Building and Empowerment

External organizations cannot by themselves make a significant difference for exploited or vulnerable children in a country; nor it is their role to solve national problems. The appropriate and important contribution of external organizations including external donors, inter-governmental bodies and external NGOs is to support catalytic and strategic actions to promote and strengthen national policies, priorities and programmes through collaboration with appropriate national partners and counterparts. The main thrust of collaboration would be to enhance the skills and capacities of the indigenous organizations so that the policies and programmes in a country become increasingly self-reliant and sustainable.

2.2. A Coordinated Approach at the National Level

It is especially important that external organizations follow a coordinated approach in developing and carrying out their assistance activities. It is neither expected nor desirable, that all international cooperation fit into the straitjacket of a particular national policy or plan, especially when workable solutions are yet to be found. Diversity and creativity are strengths in tackling such intractable and complex issues as the sexual exploitation of children. At the same time, international assistance needs to recognize the primacy of indigenous responsibility and aim at developing national capacities to prevent the dissipation of scarce national resources in too-divergent or conflicting programmes. External organizations need to engage in dialogue with national authorities, recognizing, understanding and supporting their priorities and objectives both in mainstream and targeted educational efforts for children at special risk.

VI. CONCLUSION

If the worldwide alert sounded by the Congress is to be heeded, the educational strategies and measures outlined above have to be transformed into action. The value of independent efforts by governments, local and international NGOs, UN and multi-lateral agencies, donors and the media cannot be underestimated; they have raised consciousness, aroused the conscience and begun to chart the direction for concerted action. But so far, together, they have only nibbled at different parts of the problem. If the commercial sexual exploitation of children is ever to be eliminated, or even reduced, education must be a true force for change. To do this, it must reach across school and community and include children and adults; it must be based firmly on the CRC, which obliges States Parties and civil society to respect and safeguard the rights of all children. And it must embrace the fundamental principles of self worth, participation, respect for others and self sufficiency.

But education does not work in isolation. Only a global commitment of partnership, purpose, and a sense of urgency by all sectors and all levels of society will make a dent in this forbidding obstacle to children's dignity and development.

¹ Submitted by UNICEF.

²Acknowledging the distinction between child and adolescent and the varying age definitions according to national and customary law, the term children is used throughout to refer to anyone under the age of 18, as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

³ Coombs, P.H., and Ahmed, M., *Attacking Rural Poverty: How Nonformal Education Can Help*, World Bank and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

⁴ UNESCO, World Education Report, Paris, 1995

⁵ *Progress of Nations*, 1996, "The Convention: Actions So Far", p.40.

⁶ Participants' discussion at the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Consultation in preparation for the World Congress, Pretoria, S.A., 17-19 April, 1996.

⁶ School-based Interventions for Youth Health and Development: Report of the Fourth Technical Support Group Meeting; UNICEF, Health Promotion Unit.

⁸ "Lessons Learned in Assisting Sexually-Exploited Adolescent Women and Girls": A Latin American Regional Seminar; 22-25 February 1994; Child hope Regional Office for South America and the International Catholic Child Bureau - Secretariat for Latin America.

⁹ This statement comes from: Stacki, S., Pigozzi, M., *Empowering Female Teachers as an Interactive Dialectic Process: Examples from South Asia*, Convergence, Vol., XXVIII, No 3, 1995.

¹⁰ Lessons Learned...A Latin American Regional Seminar, *ibid*.

¹¹ Sexual and Reproductive Health Promotion, Report of the Final Technical Support Group Meeting, UNICEF, 12-15 June, 1995, Lusaka Zambia.

¹² A 1996 paper by UNICEF on policies and strategies related to the protection of children endorsed the two-prong mutually-supportive approaches of mainstreaming and targeted activities. This strategy calls for partnerships to extend relevant and quality education to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, as well as combining education with other essential social services.