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Progress and problems: action since Stockholm¹

Has there been progress since 1996?

Since the first World Congress Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in 1996 focused world attention on the issue of CSEC, there has been a substantial increase in activities designed to counter both the incidence of abuse and its negative impact on children. These include interventions from a range of players including inter-governmental bodies, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based groups.

It is clear that the number of interventions has increased. Whether or not there has been a concomitant level of positive change for children at risk, being abused or already abused through CSEC, however, is less certain.

Uncertainty is also a result of incomplete, poor or misleading data, since it is difficult to measure progress when base indicators are lacking. Understanding of the issue of CSEC has historically suffered from a paucity of reliable data. A lack of consistency in the use of definitions has meant that much information collected is not comparable. When research refers to the incidence of sexual abuse and/or exploitation, does it include reports of all forms of such abuse, for example touching or verbal harassment, alongside and undifferentiated from the most extreme forms of sexual violence? How many children are affected and how can programmes be shown to be reaching them, decreasing abuse or protecting those who are at risk? Numbers are an important part of understanding, and inform and direct situation analysis. They are also an important part of any campaign, and this has led to the frequent abuse of numbers for purposes of illustration or mobilization.

It has been suggested that the quality of much of the statistical data currently being presented is the product of highly suspect research. Researcher Judith Ennew has summed this up: “In general terms the available global discourse on this theme is characterized by a poor understanding and use of qualitative information, lack of attention to research techniques, the reproduction of myths and unsubstantiated facts, as well as the use of assumptions and campaigning imperatives in place of established bodies of theory”.

A feature of reporting is blurring of certain categories, which obscures rather than reflects the real situation. Numbers are cited in a circular fashion, “until a body of knowledge is assumed to have been created”. Though Ennew wrote this before 1996, concerns about the adequacy of information remain. The lack of data that can be disaggregated by age, gender, ethnic origin and socio-economic circumstances of affected children is reflected in the recommendations to countries that come from the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in which the call for better data collection is almost always included.

Efforts have been made in some regions to undertake more situation analysis, and to generate better and more consistent and comparable data. Such studies, if conducted with rigour, can identify trends and changes over time, and this is crucial in promoting the development of appropriate response strategies. Two quite distinct examples of useful data collection methods have been used to the benefit of programming since 1996. One is the ‘rapid assessment’ methodology used by the International Labour Organization’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC). This works at grassroots level with targeted groups of children and presents fully disaggregated findings and trends without extrapolating to the general, thus providing usable data over a small area for programming. Another is the ‘Eurobarometer’ series pioneered by the European Commission, which uses wide-reaching public opinion questionnaires to identify attitudes towards specific topics across the 15 Member States of the

European Union. This data is collected across a large sample of carefully identified target groups. The results are highly disaggregated and can provide, for example, insight into the level of sexual violence that is tolerated by women in the age group 30 – 35 in the north of Europe. Regular repetition of the Eurobarometer exercise allows measurement of attitude change, perhaps the only real indication of whether the many ‘awareness raising’ and public education programmes are having some impact.

However, there continue to be myriad examples of poor quality reports, repeating data whose origin is at best uncertain. New research at times replicates the mistakes of the past, including a lack of expertise in research methods, use of biased data, skewed or small samples, no control groups, with inappropriately generalized findings. Data presented continue to be internally inconsistent and confusing. The extent and documentation of CSEC continues to be a challenge because of the lack of a uniform definition of what child sexual exploitation entails. There are few examples of rigorous research; existing data is characterized by a poor understanding and use of quantitative data, and analysis is hampered by a lack of data presented within a cultural context and by shifting global patterns.

Does it matter? Indeed it does, because research and analysis are not just information in isolation: they inform planning of programmes, decisions of funding bodies, and thus the action that is undertaken. Misleading data means inappropriate or ineffective action.

Did the first World Congress in 1996 give direction on what action might be taken?

The 122 participating governments, NGOs, intergovernmental agencies and others at the first World Congress in Stockholm in August 1996 unanimously adopted the *Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action*. The Agenda for Action provides a checklist of essential actions (varying from criminalization of the adult exploiter to non-penalization of the child victim) and integrated measures (from prevention to recovery and reintegration, from law enforcement to child participation) that need to be taken if efforts to eliminate CSEC are to be effective.

Additionally, the Agenda for Action set two principal goals by the year 2000. Participants undertook to:

- identify/establish national agendas/plans of action against CSEC;
- identify/establish national focal points and collect disaggregated data on CSEC.

There have been some encouraging developments since 1996. CSEC has gained a much higher profile at all levels, and the Stockholm Congress and instruments have been very much a platform on which cooperation has been founded and efforts have been focused.

Some although not enough countries have developed or are developing national plans of action against CSEC (approximately 52 countries at mid-2001). There have been important legislative changes as well as some high profile examples of successful law enforcement efforts against exploiters, including transnational operations illustrating good cooperation among different national law enforcement groups and Interpol.

There has been greater emphasis on children as stakeholders against CSEC and the need to enable and respect them as actors against the phenomenon, including through two important global conferences of young people against CSEC, in Vancouver and Manila.

In some regions there has been increased resource commitment and regional and sub-regional cooperation and information exchange has improved.

At global level, three major treaties have been adopted in the area of CSEC: an *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography* (2000); *ILO Convention 182 Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour* (1999); and a *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*, supplementing the *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (2000).

What has not yet been done?

There remain unmet challenges in the Stockholm *Agenda for Action* and the fight against CSEC, however. Some countries have still not made tackling CSEC a priority, despite the heinous nature of the crime, and continue to limit discussion of this issue as well as expenditure on it.

The target of all countries having national plans of action in place by the 2nd World Congress will not be met, although it is to be hoped that the holding of the Congress will itself give added impetus to this effort. Similarly, it is not clear how many countries have identified national focal points and data collection mechanisms, but there are very few.

There is still much to be done in the area of law enforcement. Child victims are still being revictimized by the legal process and legislative policy framework in some countries and there is particularly poor follow-up of children who have been trafficked and then returned to their country of origin.

There is much to be done to tackle the demand side of CSEC, including understanding and sharing information on the nature of the exploiter and the mechanisms for exploitation; an understandable emphasis on the need to protect and help children has meant that very little work has been done to reduce or mitigate demand.

The panoply of programming options, however, has been mobilized in efforts to combat CSEC. The challenge remains ensuring that the specific challenges in any given area are correctly identified, the best programming option chosen and its impact measured over time.

What kinds of programmes work?

There is no simple answer to this question, although some general principles are clear. When programming options are considered, there are a number of elements that need to be kept in mind.

First, services need to be child-centred: programmes must fully respect all elements of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. This means valuing the voice of children and including them in programming, from sources of information to participants in action undertaken. It requires that programmes be evaluated in terms of their impact on the child's overall well-being.

Second, children should have access to services, aimed at them as children, that promote recovery. This recognizes children's particular developmental needs, and also reflects the particular skills needed by those working with children and young people. These skills, including communication skills and accessibility, among others, are often seen to be in short supply. Accessibility of services for the most marginalized groups in society is fundamental.

Third, transferability of approaches is important as a means of accelerating progress. One implication of this may be the need to ensure that approaches are geared to available resources. The advancement of highly professional or clinical inputs, rather than the development of community-based para-professional skills, may restrict expansion and reduce access and viability of programmes in the medium term, in many parts of the world. Transferability, though, also has to be operated within a context of choices of strategies and interventions that take account of cultural and traditional differences

Fourth, programmes need to take into account not just the child's vulnerability to, involvement in or emergence from CSEC, but also other factors relating to the child's vulnerability. S/he may be a refugee child, for example, be living on the streets, or have dropped out of school. S/he may be from a dysfunctional family, be suffering other forms of violence at home or at school, or otherwise need support, protection and care. Programmes that take an integrated approach both to the child and to the intervention and its modalities – for example through partnerships with other organizations working in a different but related area – are more likely to benefit the child than stand-alone programmes that leave some of his/her needs unmet.

Fifth, good programming cannot be identified, and lessons cannot be learned, unless programmes and projects are effectively evaluated against pre-determined, agreed criteria that centre on the impact of the action on the child. In this respect, the input of the child, family and/or community, where possible, to determining measurement indicators is extremely important, since actions that fulfil the needs identified by those at whom they are targeted are likely to be most successful and sustainable.

Finally, a multi-disciplinary perspective is important, as is multi-sector response. CSEC is too complex an issue to be addressed from a single or simple perspective. For example, no one group has the expertise to address all the issues facing children who have been sexually abused. Teachers, social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, youth workers, doctors, nurses and others (not least other children) must be involved. In practice this should be reflected in training that is multi-disciplinary and in networks that offer a range of viewpoints.

What programme options exist?

Many different kinds of programmes are run by NGOs, inter-governmental organizations and other bodies working against CSEC. These can be categorized into a number of different areas:

Protection, prevention

- Girls' education/empowerment: this is an important element both in contributing to empowering of girls within their communities and helping them to understand the risks they might face, for example if they relocate, are 'placed' in domestic service or break away from family protection mechanisms.
- Boys' education is similarly important, not only to raise understanding of the risk boys can face but also because research clearly shows that most abusers are male. Educating boys to become responsible, non-abusive men is one way to address the demand side of CSEC.
- Awareness-raising targeting family/social services/media/schools/community is a means of building community-level protection for children. Often these 'care-takers' may be unaware of the risks facing their children and may unwittingly contribute to their vulnerability. Sometimes exploiters and abusers figure among these groups and they need to understand both the full impact of their abuse on children and the sanctions they face when caught.
- Awareness raising among police/customs/the judicial sector is also an important element of protection because these sectors are most likely to come into contact with children in abusive or potentially abusive situations. Their understanding of the signs of abuse and their ability to deal with it quickly and effectively without detriment to the child is vital.
- Neighbourhood watch groups (often volunteers)/helplines are tried and tested methods of encouraging vigilance in communities, and reporting of abuse. Although this may seem to be an action that can only occur when a child is already being abused, in practice it also raises the level of vigilance and protection and contributes to reducing vulnerability and risk.

Rescue, recovery, rehabilitation, reintegration

- Rapid intervention is in most places a matter for police, but in some countries multi-sector teams have been piloted. The Ministry of Social Welfare in Metro Manila, Philippines, for example, has developed rapid response teams that include police officers, social workers and NGO support teams, who act on reports that children are being prostituted and conduct raids with the aim of apprehending offenders while being able to provide immediate support for the children.
- Interception at point of vulnerability is an approach that has been taken, for example, to interrupt trafficking schemes and remove children before they disappear into exploitation. An NGO in the Philippines has worked with ships' captains to help them to identify

children on their ferries who are not met at the port and who may be vulnerable to recruiters working for brothels or pimps.

- Drop-in centres/refuges/case management. This is important so that children who themselves seek help have access to the services they need to be able to begin their recovery. Such support might include legal advice including advice on repatriation if they have been moved from their community, health facilities, psychosocial counselling and access to training and other services that will help them to build a lower-risk future. Adolescents in prostitution who cannot exit for various reasons nevertheless need support, particularly health services, until they can be helped.
- Skills training/alternative life skills/income-generating schemes are vital if children from poor communities are to build a future. Many children who have exited prostitution say that they succumbed to recruiters because they ‘wanted to be able to have nice things’ or just find a better life. Many traditional skills-training schemes taught (and in some cases continue to teach) skills such as hairdressing or dressmaking that may not respond to market needs and which ultimately do not offer employment opportunities for children who have been trained. Research on the local job market, awareness of employability factors such as literacy and computer skills, and general life skills that complete task skills training are integral elements of effective programmes.
- Long-term care/half-way houses are necessary where children cannot return to their families or community. Although this is a long-term commitment, it is essential in instances, for example, where the child has been rejected as ‘unclean’, or may have health issues to deal with such as HIV infection. Pioneering halfway house schemes in Costa Rica are attempting to become self-financing by training the girls to operate small restaurants and canteens, so that they can generate the income needed to finance the home.

Legislation, training, law enforcement, implementation

- Legislative review is the work of governments in consultation with civil society partners, and is important to keep pace with the changing nature of CSEC and increased understanding of national and regional responsibilities to eliminate it. A good legal framework is a vital support to those who work for children and against abuse.
- Training of police, customs and judicial sectors helps to complete the protection provided by strong legislation, since laws are only as effective as those that implement them. There have been a number of examples of cooperation between police forces to upgrade skills, of regional initiatives such as those promoted by the European Union’s STOP Programme and the Europe/Asia exchanges organized under the ASEM initiative. The challenge of poorly informed and often corruptible officials in these sectors remains, however.
- NGO, media and community monitoring of implementation has been an important ‘watchdog’ activity that ensures that the expectations raised in 1996 are honoured.

Policy, advocacy, research, strategy, planning

- Work with governments/private sector/groupings eg trade unions. The concept of ‘community’ in work against CSEC is complex. There are many different ‘communities’ that can be mobilized to act in the interests of child protection, including governments and decision-makers responsible for legal reform and social frameworks. Trade unions have been active in raising awareness among workers, for example, since there is no group that does not potentially include abusers or potential abusers.
- Advocacy among young people and the media that inform them is an important and under-developed area of programming. Peer pressure is a major factor in young people’s decision-making and in the level of their vulnerability to coercion. The media are enormously influential, including in countries where media are still ‘low tech’. Radio, film, poster

campaigns and local advertising all convey messages that contribute to building children's expectations and values.

- Collaborative planning at local, national, regional level/strategic policy and action plans. Because of the complex nature of CSEC and the diversity of possible responses to it, analysis and action plans need to be drawn up at the local, national and regional levels. In the north of Thailand, for example, regional authorities have worked with NGOs and researchers to put in place five-year plans for action across a wide range of disciplines in their regions.

Networks, information sharing, multi-sectoral cooperation

- Web sites/newsletters/meetings/exchange mechanisms/focal points. Information sharing is vital to effective coordination and if duplication and waste are to be avoided. Web-based resources and networks, simple newsletters, small meetings and international conferences are all part of the vital processes of networking and exchange.
- Evaluation and monitoring/lessons learned/experience-sharing are the next step to information sharing. These provide the 'added value' that is necessary if action against CSEC is to develop and improve. In recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on monitoring and evaluation of programming, and of analysis and sharing of the lessons learned (good and bad). The 2nd World Congress is itself part of this important process.

Each of these areas of activity is independently important in tackling the specific needs of a child or group of children, depending on the child, community, town, region or country in which the action takes place. The individual strengths and experiences of the agency implementing the activity is also an important factor. Beyond individual programming, however, it is particularly important to ensure that all the small, individual programmes build into a consolidated, ideally coordinated response to CSEC.

To support this, a number of regional and sub-regional initiatives exist, including for example the United Nations inter-agency Trafficking in Women and Children Project and working group in the Mekong sub-region; the European Commission's Daphne Programme, which is a framework for action by the 15 Member States of the European Union and accession and EFTA countries; and the ILO's Central and West Africa framework against trafficking.

The important lesson of coordination and complementarity learned at Stockholm remains a key success factor.

¹ This summary borrows from *Prevention, Protection and Recovery*, one of six theme papers prepared as background reading for participants at the 2nd World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Yokohama, Japan, 17 – 20 December 2001. The paper was written by Jane Warburton. Note that all references to research and other source documents are given in the original paper.