



Jobs for former child soldiers (Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi)



International
Labour
Organization

BACKGROUND

While there are several reasons why children join armed forces and groups, poor living conditions are increasingly recognized as being at the heart of the problem. Children's testimonies often refer to their enrolment as a strategy to ensure immediate survival and to earn a living. This clearly shows that effective prevention and reintegration are dependent on addressing the economic dimensions of child recruitment. Work, or the absence of it, is at the heart of enrolment and prevention, and makes or breaks the release of children from armed forces and groups.

The IPEC implemented Projects in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) aiming to support former child soldiers and children at risk of recruitment in accessing decent work. The economic empowerment of children, followed by extended employment support, proved to be an effective strategy to achieve successful and sustainable integration into the labour market.

ACTION

The project conducted rapid assessments to identify attractive jobs as well as relevant service providers in the localities where children were being reintegrated. Children were exposed to existing trades and occupations through job fairs and organized guided tours of workplaces. They were then assisted in choosing a professional project that matched their aspirations and capacities with the economic reality. The project provided vocational skills training as well as basic education and life skills training in view of increasing the employability of children.

Due to the lack of wage employment opportunities in the conflict-affected project area, children were supported in starting a business, either individually or in groups. The project provided them with the necessary materials, helped in identifying and renting a suitable workplace and assisted in legal, regulatory and administrative procedures. When possible, access to micro-health insurance schemes was facilitated, thereby improving health coverage for beneficiaries and their dependants. Children benefited from entrepreneurship training based on the ILO "Start and Improve Your Business" (SIYB) package as well as financial literacy training. All businesses opened accounts at micro-finance institutions and regularly deposited savings. The most successful ones had access to micro-credit to expand or diversify their activities. Most importantly, children benefited from long-term, regular and professional follow-up from the project's implementing agencies.

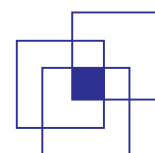
In the eyes of the community, the project targeted war-affected children without making the distinction (except for internal monitoring purposes) between former child soldiers and other vulnerable children in the community. All received the same services.

ACHIEVEMENTS/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The variety of services provided to beneficiaries has contributed to the creation of productive jobs that deliver a fair income; security in the workplace and social protection for families; better prospects for personal development and social integration; freedom for children to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives; and equality of opportunity and treatment for all girls and boys – in other words, decent work. By helping former child soldiers to become productive members of their communities, the project also contributed to their social reintegration.

The inclusive approach proved to be an effective way for reaching the girl child soldiers who did not have to uncover their past association with armed forces/groups and also contributed to reconciliation within the

Good practice





Murhula is a former child soldier from Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu, in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. He was released from the Maï Maï in 2001. Murhula participated in a job fair and a guided tour to different workplaces organized by the IPEC Project. He visited the workshop of a master craftsman, who produces guitars, and was attracted to this occupation. Murhula became an apprentice in the same workshop and learned how to make electric and acoustic guitars. At the end of his apprenticeship, he stayed in the workshop and is now a business partner of the master craftsman who trained him. His activity is lucrative; he sells several guitars a week, in particular to church choirs.

community. Several cooperatives had former child soldiers (sometimes from different factions) and other vulnerable children working side by side.

SUSTAINABILITY

Decent jobs are key both to prevent recruitment and to ensure sustainable reintegration of former child soldiers. IPEC is building on this good practice and, more generally, on the experience and knowledge acquired through field projects targeting child soldiers. It pursues a multi-pronged strategy aiming at upgrading the economic components of release and reintegration programmes for children worldwide. The key elements of this good practice have been developed and documented in a strategic framework and in an operational guide (see References) that are being used as a basis for training at country level. The good practice is also being used to update and develop inter-agency standards on reintegration of children and youth formerly associated with armed forces and groups.

LESSONS LEARNED

Economic (re)integration of children is a long and complex process that requires sufficient funding. This should be built into the project design. The time frame for the follow-up of businesses should not be less than one year. The implementing agency needs to recruit and train field staff that can provide regular and professional coaching to new businesses.

Considering the nature of the services provided to beneficiaries, it is preferable to select implementing agencies that are specialized in the provision of vocational training and/or business development services and to train them to deal with this specific target group.

The implementing agency should manage with particular attention the assessment of local employment opportunities and the vocational orientation phase. The latter determines, to a large extent, the success or failure of reintegration.

NECESSARY CONDITIONS

The replication of the good practice relies on the availability of various service providers in the project area (micro-finance institutions, micro-health insurance schemes and business development service providers). The reality of certain post-conflict environments in which children are being reintegrated determines the limits.

REFERENCES

- IPEC: *Prevention of child recruitment and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups. Strategic framework for addressing the economic gap* (Geneva, ILO, 2007) (www.ilo.org/ipecinfo/product/viewProduct.do?productId=6965).
- IPEC: *How-to-guide on the economic reintegration of working age children associated with armed forces and groups* (Geneva, ILO, 2010).

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