

Through the eyes of a child: refugee children speak about violence

A report on participatory assessments carried out with
refugee and returnee children in Southern Africa

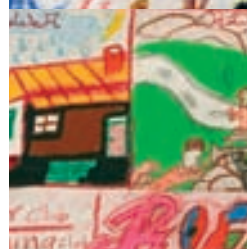
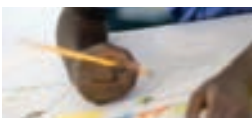
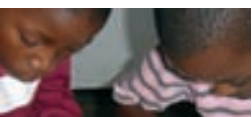
2005 – 2007



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And warmest thanks to the children who took part in the Participatory Assessments and allowed us to present their stories and artwork in the report. Their experiences and insights will enable others to understand the problems they face, and their solutions will contribute to improved SGBV and child-rights programming in UNHCR operations in Southern Africa and elsewhere.

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Acronyms

AGDM	Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
MFT	Multi-Functional Team
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PA	Participatory Assessment
PMTCT	Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Children living as refugees and returnees in eight sub-Saharan Africa locations¹ are suffering not only due to their refugee and returnee status, but also other factors over which they have no control: hostility and violence from local people (arising largely from competition over scarce resources and services), and pervasive sexual and gender-based violence. Children encounter violence and sexual assault in schools, communities and homes. Yet these problems are rarely acknowledged and the voices of young refugees are rarely heard.

Between 2005 and 2007 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) carried out a series of groundbreaking Participatory Assessments (PAs) with children living in refugee and returnee situations in Southern Africa to discover: how children are being treated, how they perceive the violence with which they are often faced, how they cope, and what suggestions they have for improving their situation. The holding of such assessments forms part of UNHCR's strategy for Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM), the overall aim of which is to promote gender equality and the rights of all refugees.

The information gathered during the assessments served as the basis for Action Plans designed to address the various issues raised. Moreover, through this participatory methodology, UNHCR sought to give refugee and returnee children a voice in defining and resolving their problems, and to ensure that their voice was heard by adults. Thus an important outcome of the PAs was that the attention of UNHCR and partner staff, as well as parents and caregivers, was drawn to the needs and rights of children and their obligation to fulfil them. This process was empowering for the young people – who are generally among the world's most disempowered – and is contributing to redressing some of their concerns as Action Plans are implemented.

Process

Some 24 children took part in each Participatory Assessment exercise. Separate workshops were held for the two identified age groups (10-13 and 14-17) to ensure that sessions were appropriately tailored to these different development stages. The workshops were organised around artwork as a medium to encourage reflection and discussion. Over the course of the two-day workshop, the collection of drawings began to resemble a "picture" of each child's life. (This methodology is described in more detail in Annex 1).

The workshop methodology remained largely the same from early 2005 (when PAs were held in three countries), through the last two PAs undertaken in 2007. But at the same time, there was a gradual shift from using the workshops mainly to gather information to seeing them as an opportunity to strengthen the capacity of camp and UNHCR personnel, to listen and respond to the problems facing children. After the PAs were complete, the findings were discussed, summarised and put into a report. A "report back" was also produced for children who participated in the PA. Following PAs in 2005, UNHCR brought a wider group of stakeholders together to discuss the findings and develop concrete Action Plans to address the problems identified.

1. Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Key Problems Identified

Although the refugee situations differ in several respects – size, ethnic mix, location, quality of services, etc., most of the key problems identified during the participatory assessments were quite similar:

- Children experience violence within and outside refugee camps, as well as in reintegration and urban situations.
- Refugee children often experience discrimination by local residents – including teachers – and sometimes experience discrimination within camps from members of other ethnic groups.
- Gender-based violence directed at girls, including harassment and rape, is widespread.
- Children living without parents are especially vulnerable, due to lack of adult protection and scarce economic resources.
- Forced marriages, often resulting from rape and pregnancy, are common in several camps.
- Alcohol and substance abuse by adults often results in violence and sexual assault against children.
- Some of the tasks assigned to children (such as collecting water and gathering firewood) put them at risk for discrimination and rape.

Certain problems were more severe in some situations than others; for example, refugee children in South Africa are located in particularly violence-prone urban areas; Angolan children who lived as refugees in Zambia are not well accepted upon their return to Angola. Camps where refugees share water and schools with local communities, and where children gather firewood on a regular basis, were singled out as particularly dangerous for children. In addition, ethnic-based tensions are more acute in some camps than others.

The findings also revealed that children are sometimes perpetrators, as well as victims, of violence, including sexual harassment, rape, bullying and discrimination. In some cases young perpetrators were from surrounding communities, in others, fellow refugees. At the same time the PAs revealed great compassion on the part of many boys and girls for the plight of unaccompanied and separated children. Boys also acknowledged that both younger and older girls face special problems in the camps, related to their vulnerability and the volume of daily domestic chores they are expected to carry out.

Children's Protection Strategies

The strategies adopted by children to protect themselves against violence were simple and straightforward. In the main, they said that venturing out in groups, rather than alone, was an important means of protecting themselves, as was running away from or seeking to avoid potentially violent confrontations. Other strategies mentioned were: staying indoors

at night and “keeping busy” to remain out of harm’s way. Trying harder to blend in with the local population (through dress and language) was a potential strategy mentioned in a few PAs. A perceptive comment by older girls living in South Africa noted: *“We cannot stay here and hate people of the country. If we don’t like them I don’t think they like us either. I think we must try to learn their language. Sometimes we don’t participate in other activities because we always isolate ourselves...”*

“We cannot stay here and hate people of the country. If we don’t like them I don’t think they like us either. I think we must try to learn their language. Sometimes we don’t participate in other activities because we always isolate ourselves...”

(Girl in South Africa, aged 14-17)

An important point that emerged from the discussions was that children are largely unaware of groups or individuals in the camp from whom they could seek protection or report violations of their rights. Some expressed scepticism about confiding in the police and religious figures, noting that these authority figures are sometimes involved in abuse or, in the case of the police, prone to corruption. Avoiding trouble and reporting problems to parents were commonly seen as the only options. Children often saw education as both a short- and long-term protection strategy, since it provides a protective environment during the day and will hopefully give them the means for finding employment and having a better life as adults. For example: *"I like to go to school so that I can eventually get work and be able to make a life for myself."*



"I like to go to school so that I can eventually get work and be able to make a life for myself."

(Girl in Zambia, aged 10-13)

Impact on Children

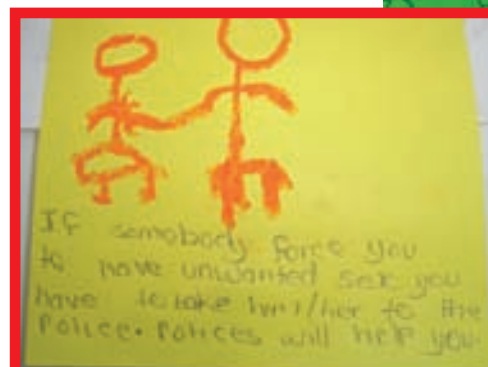
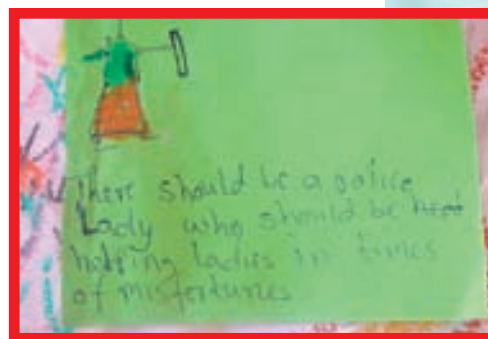
Most children, especially girls, expressed feelings of being powerless against the forces of violence and discrimination they encounter on a regular basis. Asked how children can remain safe, typical responses were: *"There's no solution to that"* and *"There is no safe place for children."* One child noted: *"We are always living in fear."* Many also feel rejected, unloved, and confused about their identity. Few refugee children seem to have an active social life involving friendships and age-appropriate social and recreational activities. This was sometimes a result of lack of facilities and equipment, but also due to hostility from local residents, and because parents or guardians expect them to take on extensive household chores, or earn an income, due to the poverty of most refugee households.

"We are always living in fear."

(Boy in Zambia, aged 10-13)

Children's Suggestions

At the end of each PA children were asked to suggest measures capable of overcoming the problems they had identified. Among the solutions suggested most frequently were the need for better security, the importance of having access to adults who will listen to and protect them, and the need for better care and protection of unaccompanied and separated children. In addition, many children suggested a greater role for adult refugees in the camp's institutions, such as schools and clinics or as translators at police stations. Increased access to recreational and social activities was also requested. Finally, the children agreed on the need for more opportunities to express their views and play a more active role in resolving problems in the camps.



Actions – Challenges – Impact

UNHCR organised meetings among key stakeholders (agency and camp staff representatives of involved government agencies, partner NGOs and other community groups) to discuss the PA findings and identify short- and long-term steps to be taken to address the issues identified. In most situations, stakeholders agreed on the need to:

- Raise awareness on children's rights in camps and neighbouring communities.
- Increase the visibility and accessibility of human resources available to protect children, such as counsellors, security personnel and social workers.
- Develop mechanisms to meet the special protection needs of unaccompanied and separated children.
- Discuss with school management and teachers the complaints raised by children, to end unacceptable practices such as corporal punishment and discrimination.
- Enhance knowledge and understanding among all stakeholders of children's needs and rights, especially in relation to sexual and gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS.
- Establish or improve facilities at centres where children can safely participate in recreational activities.

Action Plans were devised defining the responsibility of different stakeholders for undertaking the many tasks. This report summarises information on the progress made to date in each camp or location where a PA was held, as well as the challenges encountered and the impact on children. In some cases, for example: schools were rehabilitated and separate latrines built for girls and boys, active campaigns were carried out on SGBV, youth centres were improved, or awareness-raising was successfully carried out with local communities.

Among the most common challenges faced were staff rotations in UNHCR and partner agencies (slowing implementation and requiring constant training/orientation of new staff), internal bureaucratic procedures inhibiting action on new initiatives for lengthy periods, insufficient funds to carry out new programmes, and lack of commitment and/or capacity among host governments and partner agencies. Cultural norms and practices that place little value on children's rights and condone gender-based violence are an obstacle in most situations.

The most tangible impact of the PA process is that, in almost every situation, it has lent prominence to children's voices, enhancing their self-confidence and increasing respect from adults. Similarly, the PAs clarified the problems faced by children, leading to new understanding among the various stakeholders working with refugee and returnee children. In specific contexts other impacts were identified, such as: increased privacy and safety for girls due to construction of separate latrines, decreased harassment from residents following action by local authorities, reduced tensions with neighbouring communities as a result of construction of new water points, or fewer child pregnancies and reduced alcohol abuse as a result of new opportunities for recreation and skills training. In Malawi, it appeared that incidents of trafficking were sharply reduced following awareness-raising efforts. In Mozambique, security for children has improved since camp police began accompanying those looking for firewood.

As the process evolved over the past three years, UNHCR has increasingly recognised the important contribution children can make. UNHCR has thus placed growing emphasis on building its own capacity and that of its partners to understand and respond to issues facing children. Greater effort has been placed on training facilitators to lead PAs with children, on interpreting and reflecting on children's input and insights, and on ensuring that young people are consulted about and involved in measures aimed at making a difference in their lives.

II. PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

This section provides a synthesis of the situation described by children in the eight Southern African countries where PAs were held. The findings from each situation are presented separately, enabling the reader to correlate the problems and suggestions discussed during the PA with the actions taken, challenges encountered, and impact on children. The findings are listed chronologically; thus countries listed first have had considerably more time to take action than those at the end. Direct quotes from children appear in *italics*.

The first situations assessed, in 2005, represented three different types of UNHCR operations in the region: child returnees (Angola); refugee children in urban situations (South Africa); and children living in a refugee camp (Zambia). The results of PAs in these countries were subsequently incorporated into the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children. Recognising the potential of PAs to reveal the realities facing refugee children and improve their situation, UNHCR used the same methodology in Botswana and Malawi in 2005. The next year a PA was held in Mozambique, and in 2007 the process concluded with PAs in refugee camps in Zimbabwe and Namibia. (Detailed reports on each PA and the child-friendly version are available through UNHCR.)



Context: Refugee children in these two large cities live in differing situations; some, especially unaccompanied children, live in shelters; some live with families in rental units; and others live alone or with siblings. There are no refugee camps in South Africa and all refugees live in local communities. The large influx of foreigners into the country has sparked xenophobia against refugees and asylum seekers. Both refugee and local children affected by violence or other problems are referred to government or NGO providers when problems arise. UNHCR and its partners also play an important role in providing protection and facilitating assistance.



"You come here and steal our jobs and steal our schools."

(Girl, aged 14-17)

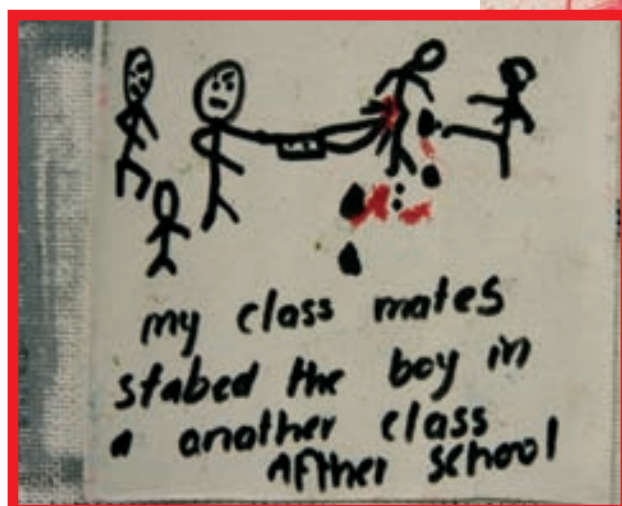
Children's Experience: Many of the children spoke of violence they had witnessed in their area or been directly exposed to: robbery, shootings, stabbings, and home break-ins involving rape. As a result, the children live in fear of attack. One boy had been used as a human shield during a robbery. Especially in Johannesburg, children are very fearful of the police, who single them out as "foreigners" and try to extort money or beat or rape them. Girls also reported that South African men identify them as foreigners by their dress or manner and rob or assault them. Children in Cape Town mentioned numerous incidents of violence in their schools, as well as parks and trains, while those in Johannesburg referred to bullying, rape and abuse – especially in the school toilets. Discrimination against the children because they are foreign was a common complaint: Some people call them by an insulting nick name, and they are pushed off sidewalks, ridiculed in school and bullied by peers. One girl reported that her abusers said: *"You come here and steal our jobs and steal our schools."*





Children's Suggestions: The main suggestions offered by children were in relation to the need for someone to whom they could talk and trust to help them, and for more protection from adults at schools, on public transportation and on the streets. They stressed the need for more information to enable them to protect themselves, especially since many do not come from violent environments and have developed few coping mechanisms.

Action – Challenges – Impact: UNHCR and its partners continued to reach school children and teachers to address xenophobia against refugees. When problems arise, refugee (and local) children are referred to South African civil society groups specialising in child protection or to government agencies. Refugee children who do not speak English often face serious obstacles when dealing with South African entities. One NGO has launched an innovative initiative, promoting several types of exchange between local and refugee children to promote better mutual understanding. A DVD addressing issues raised during a PA-like process held in Durban is being distributed to service providers nationwide. UNHCR has supported the creation of Standard Operating Procedures for protecting child refugees. Social workers have held sessions for parents on child abuse and discipline, and plan structured interventions where abuse has been identified among refugee families. Staff turnover was a major hurdle in following up on PA recommendations, as is the heavy caseload of social workers, along with language and cultural issues.



ZAMBIA: Mayukwayukwa Refugee Settlement, April 2005

Context: The long war in Angola sparked construction of Mayukwayukwa in 1966, which by 2005 – even after many Angolans had returned home – was home to nearly double the intended population; over 7,000 people, half of whom were under 18 years of age. Families were given small plots to farm and other support. The camp offers several primary schools and limited access to secondary school. Almost all refugees in the camp are from Angola; a few are from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi.



Children's Experience: The most widespread concern among children was their fear of bandits who live in the bush and attack them, especially when they are collecting firewood or water or walking to nearby villages to do farm work. Rape was another serious problem; the children reported that strangers break into homes and areas where girls sleep to rape them. Sexual abuse within families was also mentioned. Girls were upset that when rape resulted in pregnancy, many parents insisted that the rapist (often an older man) marry the girl and demanded a dowry. Children felt that this was an unacceptable "income-generating activity" on the part of parents. They also mentioned that such forced marriages resulted in the end to a girl's education. PA participants stated that many girls engage in transactional sex with older men to obtain money and clothing. Child labour was another area that the children identified with violence because of the risk involved in walking long distances, poor treatment they receive from local farmers, and long hours they are required to work. Finally, many of the children said that some teachers beat them with sticks at school as punishment.



Children's Suggestions: Discussion focused on how best to report rape and other abuse. Neither the police nor church personnel were seen as adequate, as girls were apt to be sexually violated by both. A neighbourhood watch made up of women appeared to be the best solution for reporting. Girls want parents to be educated on children's rights, especially in regard to forced marriage. Most children felt that education was an important source of protection in the long run.

Actions – Challenges – Impact: The results of the PA were discussed in full with government and non-government partners, as well as with community-based service providers and volunteers, raising awareness of issues facing children. An "SGBV and Children" workshop was held in 2005, involving community development and health workers, teachers, police and others in a discussion of how to address SGBV in the camp. The issue is now being addressed in schools, during HIV/AIDS education, and through drama and poetry groups. A second workshop was held in 2007 on the topic of referrals in SGBV cases. Limited funding prevented initiation of income-generating activities for girls to prevent transactional sex. Child rights are being discussed at community and parent and teacher association (PTA) meetings and during SGBV discussions. A newly appointed female police officer and community development workers are attempting to reach out to children and serve as individuals in whom they can confide. Staff turnover within UNHCR and partner organisations and agencies, limited funding and the repatriation of 8,000 Angolan refugees, resulting in reduced staffing among implementing partners, all posed a serious challenge to PA follow-up.



ANGOLA: Moxico Province, April 2005

Context: In the town where the PA was conducted returnees had been relocated from refugee camps in the surrounding countries; some of the children participating were born in Angola, and others in Zambia. Returnees were transported by UNHCR, provided with food and non-food rations for a fixed period and, in the case of the most vulnerable, had shelters constructed for them. The settlement is located near another Angolan village; water resources and other services are shared.



Children's Experience: The main issue raised by children was violence and discrimination against them by people from the nearby community, especially when they were collecting water. Children are told they cannot have water, or made to wait until the end when the well is dry. They are shoved and attacked, and the water they collect is purposely spilled. Local residents call them "Zambianos" and tell them to return to Zambia. The same occurs in school, where they are beaten and harassed by local students and teachers, who also ridicule them because they cannot speak Portuguese. They are sometimes excluded from school for lack of fees and uniforms. Children also recount episodes of rape, in particular by soldiers, who break into homes and also harass refugee girls and boys on the street. Instances of transactional sex, among girls as young as 12, were also mentioned. Another fear was related to collecting firewood, as children feel vulnerable in the bush because of reports of bandits.

TELL PARENT
THE IMPORTANCE
OF THE SCHOOL

TELL THE PARENT
TO TELL THE
CHAIRMAN TO
GO AND SEE
THE TEACHERS

MISSTRESS

MALAWI: Dzaleka Refugee Camp, November 2005

Context: At the time of the PA, Dzaleka was the larger of two refugee camps in Malawi housing some 3,000 refugees, primarily from Rwanda, along with smaller numbers of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. The majority of the camp population is comprised of women and children under 17. It offers a well-developed infrastructure, with a school, counselling centre, clubs for children and income-generating activities, as well as local SGBV committees. Most homes have electricity. In 2007, the other camp was closed and its inhabitants moved to Dzaleka.

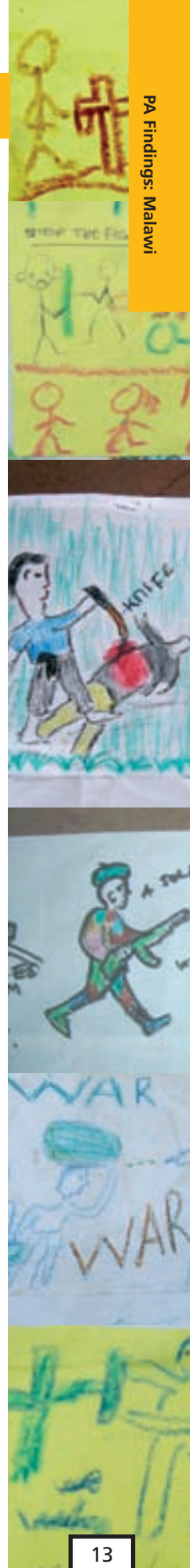


Children's Experience: Children at Dzaleka reported serious violence against them, centring mainly around sexual violence: harassment and abuse of girls by groups of teenage boys, rape, transactional sex with older men – sometimes encouraged by parents – and marriages forced by parents in exchange for goods or money. Fear of men or boys hiding in the nearby bush keeps girls from collecting firewood, often causing them to go hungry because they cannot cook without wood. Discrimination by adult Malawians against the children is severe at boreholes (mainly bullying) and markets (bullying and robbery). The children also reported two cases of trafficking of children, and exchange of goods for sex. Alcohol abuse, which leads to rape or beatings from parents or to being left alone and unprotected for days at a time, was another source of fear and violence reported. In addition, children pointed to the particular difficulties faced by those living without parents, either alone or as foster children. The former are vulnerable to attack, and the latter are badly treated in foster homes. These children often go hungry and are unable to attend school, vulnerable to exploitation, and more likely than others to turn to prostitution for survival.



Children's Suggestions: Younger children asked that they be provided with more guards and security and that parents be told not to send them to the bush for firewood. They also suggested that more boreholes be dug to avoid conflict with Malawians over water. They hoped that educating Malawians about refugees would reduce discrimination. Older children want parents to be educated about children's rights, improved access to quality medical care, and, particularly, more help for orphans and other vulnerable children. They also asked for more recreational opportunities.

Actions – Challenges – Impact: Allegations of improprieties related to food distribution were investigated; all staff received warnings, some were transferred. UNHCR took several steps to improve access to and quality of medical care. A new PMTCT facility is nearly completed, and health staff were trained on ethics and conduct. Codes of conduct for teachers and students were developed by teachers and Jesuit Refugee Services, and the primary school improved procedures for reporting physical and sexual abuse. Awareness-raising on SGBV took place for camp employees, community leaders, teachers and students; posters and billboards were posted around the camp; "Open Days" were devoted to combating gender-based violence. Similar work was carried out in relation to trafficking; only one incident was reported since 2006. Closer monitoring of unaccompanied and separated children and school drop-outs is taking place, and a new counsellor is available to work with youth and parents/guardians. A major challenge is posed by the arrival at Dzaleka of 3,000 new refugees when Malawi's other refugee camp was closed in 2007. Better reporting indicates that sexual assaults, by teachers and others, are still occurring; initial success at limiting the hours that bars are open has not been sustained; and early marriage is an ongoing problem.



BOTSWANA: Dukwi Refugee Camp, December 2005

Context: Botswana's only refugee camp, Dukwi, houses about 2,500 refugees and asylum-seekers, around 45 percent of whom are under 18 years of age. Most are from Namibia, with some Angolans and Somalis. The camp is run by the government of Botswana, with support from UNHCR, and offers several services, in some cases through partner organisations. A Multi-Functional Team (MFT) seeks to address problems of SGBV.



Children's Experience:

Violence and abuse occur in several contexts: children pointed to alcohol abuse as a major source of harassment of girls, including beating and rape, and also as the ignition point for domestic violence by drunken fathers. Widespread transactional sex was reported, often at the

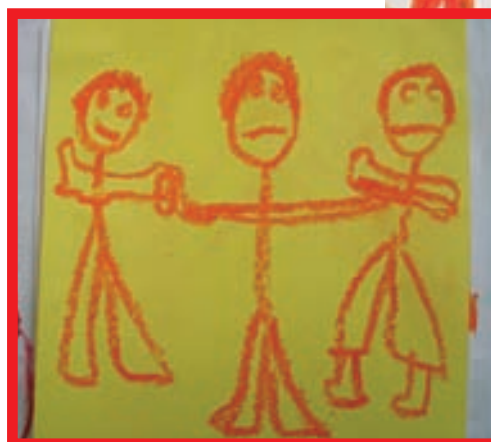
request of parents seeking income. Unaccompanied children were seen as the most likely to exchange sex with older men for food, cash or other needs. "You find girls that don't have parents... anyone can come and just open your house and enter there and rape you. No one will know and no one will help you." Walking through the bush, especially at night, is seen as dangerous in terms of rape, assault and murder. Older children must walk through the bush to get to the secondary school, and report murders and mutilation linked to witchcraft in the area. Children also reported frequent beatings by the primary school teacher. Some discrimination on the part of local residents was also mentioned, again linked to the notion that refugees deprive nationals of resources.

"You find girls that don't have parents... anyone can come and just open your house and enter there and rape you. No one will know and no one will help you."

(Boy, aged 14-17)

Children's Suggestions: Children agreed on the need for better control over alcohol and marijuana consumption to reduce violence, abuse and rape, as well as on the need for better protection and care of children living alone (such as larger food rations). Better counselling and guidance facilities for young people could help reduce transactional sex and early pregnancy. More opportunities for earning money would help keep adults and young people away from alcohol and drugs and thus alleviate the underlying problem. Campaigns to discourage abuse of children and explain their rights should be carried out, and adults should allow children to use the camp's recreational facilities. More aggressive reporting to the police was also suggested.

Actions – Challenges – Impact: The issue of alcohol abuse was incorporated into many activities and workshops for youth and adults, but limited police presence and weak laws have led to little real change in the situation. Yet when vocational training is being carried out, fewer young people were observed near shabeens, indicating the promise of this strategy if funding were available to expand these courses. (About 75 people per year are now enrolled). Progress on SGBV was slow, and several new rape cases were reported in 2007. However, efforts seem to be slowly yielding results, as children have become far more willing to report cases and to urge peers to do likewise. The UNHCR team has developed a plan for addressing these reports with clearly delineated responsibilities. Several sessions on child rights were held for community and religious leaders, teachers and children, resulting in heightened awareness and increased self-confidence among children and their refusal to be exploited. Positive results have come of support for sports activities, but more funds are needed. A reduction in teen pregnancy at Dukwi Primary School is seen as, at least in part, attributable to increased opportunities for organised recreation. Conflict over use of the community centre is largely unresolved, but the current plan is to allow TV use for children only at the Youth Centre, which is now being renovated. The Youth Centre also offers opportunities to meet with a psychologist, counsellor and HIV/AIDS specialist.



MOZAMBIQUE: Maratane Refugee Camp, April 2006

Context: The camp houses more than 4,000 refugees, of whom children under 18 constitute the majority: 56 percent. The largest number of refugees comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with fairly large groups from Rwanda and Burundi as well. The camp aims to help refugees integrate into Mozambican society and gain the tools required for self-sufficiency. DRC refugees run the primary school within the camp; another option is a nearby Mozambican public school. Water points, farmlands, health services and markets are shared with nearby communities. An SGBV initiative was launched in 2005.



Children's Experience: More than in any other camp, children at Maratane were very wary about participating in the PA – probably because of serious ethnic tensions between the majority DRC group and others. Much of the violence reported was related to these tensions: bullying, taunts, insults and physical assaults are a frequent occurrence for Rwandan and Burundian boys and girls. This phenomenon spills over into the camp's school, where Congolese teachers and pupils were reported to beat and insult the other children. Corporal punishment at schools (and at home) was also reported. Rape was the worst problem for girls, including rape by family members and other adult men and teenagers. Like girls in other camps, those at Maratane also feared rape when collecting firewood in the bush. Similarly, children at Maratane agreed that unaccompanied and separated children are particularly vulnerable. One boy reported that in foster families: *"They are treated like slaves."* An orphan girl caring for three siblings reported constant fear of home invasion and rape.

"They (children in foster families) are treated like slaves."

(Boy, aged 14-17)

Children's Suggestions: Both younger and older children expressed their suggestions in terms of things that they wished for (younger group) or that UNHCR should do for them (older children), indicating a lack of familiarity with children's rights. The main areas touched on were: reconciliation among ethnic groups, access to school, and more help from adults. Younger boys felt that camp personnel focus on adults, ignoring the needs of children. Older children also asked UNHCR to provide more food and better medical care, as well as charcoal distribution so children will not have to collect firewood. More help and protection for orphans was also requested.

Actions – Challenges – Impact: Child-friendly spaces have been organised, including a youth centre where peer education on life-skills, sports and cultural activities and sessions on SGBV and conflict resolution are held for both refugee and local children. Training sessions were held for all refugees to explain children's rights and better parenting/fostering skills, as well as the dangers of sending children alone to collect firewood. Camp police and local guards now escort groups of children collecting wood. New mechanisms were developed to provide fuel to families with special needs, and food distribution procedures have been re-designed to ensure greater protection for unaccompanied and separated children. Separate latrines for boys and girls were built at the French school, and are underway at the local public school. Efforts to educate adults on SGBV have moved more slowly, due mainly to lack of skilled staff employed by the NGO partner. The same problem has hindered progress in following up on child rights training in schools. However, class monitors and parent volunteers are now present in many classrooms to ensure that children are protected while in school. Some outreach activities in churches and communities on reconciliation and peace-building have taken place, but this activity was weakened when an NGO that was supposed to undertake the activity was unable to follow through.



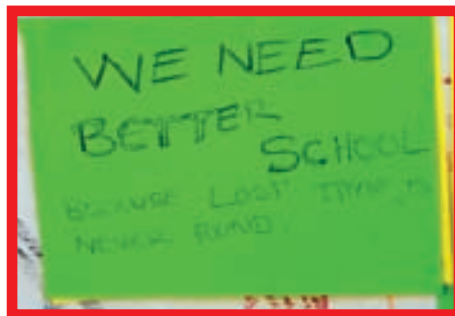
ZIMBABWE: Tongogara Refugee Camp, April 2007

Context: Tongogara houses around 2,000 refugees; primarily from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda, but also including several other population groups. There is a primary health care clinic, and the camp has electricity, so children do not usually have to fetch firewood. Housing and other infrastructure are inadequate, food distribution takes place monthly. Refugee families have an agricultural area nearby to work on. Almost all children attend primary or secondary school and church.



Children's Experience: The most serious issue for primary school children, especially girls, was harassment and beatings from local boys on their way to school. Corporal punishment was another form of violence identified: primary and secondary school children reported beatings and denial of lessons and heavy labour (older children) for minor infractions. Another school-related issue was that, at both levels, teachers make discriminatory remarks about refugee children – often reflecting resentment that refugees receive food while Zimbabweans go hungry. Local children from other schools also discriminate against refugee children. Other violence-related problems for children were domestic violence, such as drunken adults chasing and beating children, and conflicts between caregivers and their teenage children, especially boys. Additionally, children reported violence and threats of violence against Rwandan children of mixed ethnicity. A major problem identified by many older children was lack of time to study or enjoy a social life due to the heavy demands on them to work (in and out of the home). Unaccompanied and separated children were especially vulnerable to involvement in transactional sex, the children said, because they need money to buy personal items and lacked parental care and guidance. Children felt fairly safe in the camp, and mainly used protection strategies – such as moving about in groups and reporting problems to parents – to address problems encountered outside the camp and in school. The children were largely unaware of resources within the camp for their protection. Like other refugee children, those in Tongogara saw attending school as an important means to improve their lives, although they felt the quality of the education they were receiving was poor.

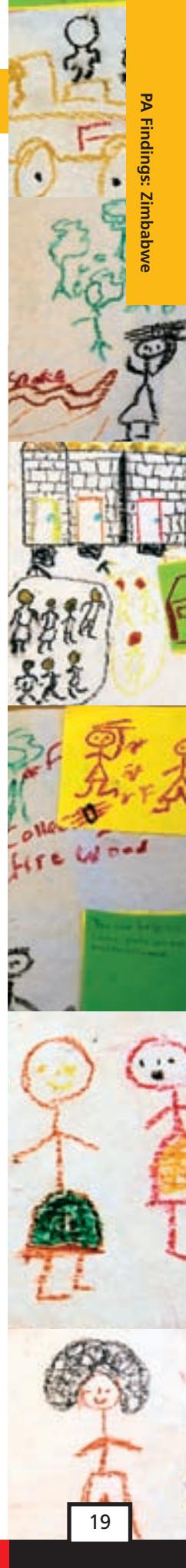
Children's Suggestions: Younger children suggested that teachers be prohibited from using corporal punishment, and that adults meet to discuss how to protect them against the boys who harass them on the way to school. Older children urged that more jobs be found for adults and youth, especially girls, to reduce the need for transactional sex and thus the risk of pregnancy or HIV infection. They also suggested an end to corporal punishment and heavy labour as punishment. *"We want the teachers to love us and treat us well. If there is no love we cannot learn well."* Both groups pointed to the need for more water points and other infrastructure to reduce tensions with local residents over resources.



Actions – Challenges – Impact: Meetings were held with local service providers and community leaders about harassment of children. The issue was also raised in a retreat attended by a local tribal leader who pledged to halt this abuse. No new cases have been reported. Attempts were made to raise the question of corporal punishment in schools, but the response was not encouraging since this practice is condoned in Zimbabwe; discussions are ongoing. Refugees and school management have not reached agreement on appropriate demands for labour on children; improving communication between the two is an ongoing challenge. Steps were taken to ensure that unaccompanied and separated children are identified early on. A multi-stakeholder "Child Protection Committee" has been organised to oversee these children, and procedures are being drafted to ensure early identification and monitoring of their situation. Unaccompanied and separated children now receive free textbooks, and steps are being taken to create income-generating opportunities.

"We want the teachers to love us and treat us well. If there is no love we cannot learn well."

(Girl, aged 14-17)



NAMIBIA: Osire Refugee Camp, June 2007

Context: Osire Refugee Camp houses over 7,000 refugees, of whom women make up nearly half and children comprise about 39 percent. The majority of refugees/asylum seekers are from Angola; the second largest group is from the Great Lakes region. Policies of the Government of Namibia inhibit freedom of movement for refugees and asylum seekers, restricting them to the camp and making integration into Namibian society difficult. In response, UNHCR Namibia is shifting operations from a traditional care and maintenance programme to one that enhances the self-reliance of the population, mainly through support for income-generating activities. Education and health services are available (although opportunities for attending 11th and 12th grade are very limited), and Boys and Girls clubs offer recreational, life skills and HIV education activities for children and youth.



"They are smoking because their parents are not there. There is nobody to give them advice."

(Boy, aged 14-17)

Children's Experience: The most serious violence experienced by children at Osire is related to alcohol (homemade beer) and other substance abuse, and the fights that break out as a result. Adult men beat or chase children when drunk, while teenage boys using drugs become more aggressive against teachers and other children, especially girls, at (and after) school. Domestic violence is also a problem for children in Osire, including frequent beatings by parents. Nevertheless, children agreed that unaccompanied and separated children are the most at risk for engaging in transactional sex (young girls in need of clothes, underclothes, soap, etc.), starting drug use or dropping out of school. Older girls said of parents: *"They give you what you need so you don't have to go out and sell yourself."* Older boys, referring to marijuana, said of a drawing: *"They are smoking because their parents are not there. There is nobody to give them advice."* Teenage pregnancy was mentioned frequently; children referred to teachers, "uncles" and sugar daddies as responsible, but did not identify sexual violence or forced marriage as major problems. Finally, children referred to negative attitudes on the part of Namibians toward refugees, noting that they feel safer within the camp.



Children's Suggestions: Older boys and girls believe that substance abuse in the camp is largely a result of the loneliness, frustration and stress faced by young people due to painful experiences before arriving at the camp and the loss of loved ones. Frustration over completing education is a special problem because after Grade 10 most young people are left with nothing to do and little hope for the future. In regard to violence, PA participants of all ages agreed that the production/sale of homemade beer and all drugs should be stopped. Community education and debate should also take place both to curb substance abuse and to discourage the use of violence against and among children. Older children, in particular, suggest that a means be found to increase incomes and educational opportunities, to reduce both transactional sex and to address the feeling of hopelessness that often leads to substance abuse and violence. Children of all ages expressed a desire that parents communicate more frequently with them, rather than resorting to physical violence.

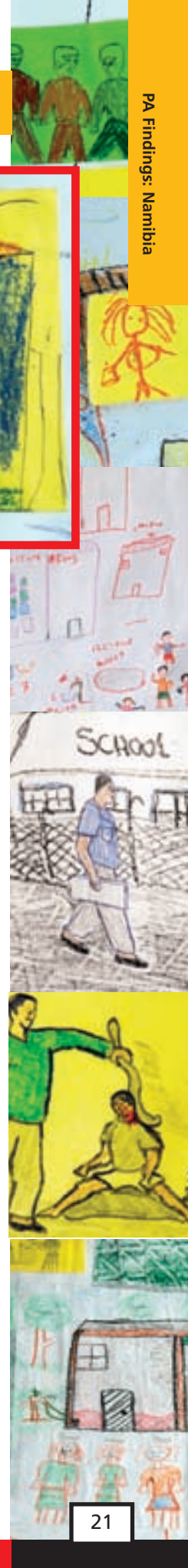


Actions – Challenges – Impact: Steps have been taken to control the distribution of alcohol, including destruction of a facility being used to produce homemade brew and police warnings to suspected brewers. Efforts to reach families and promote discussion of alcohol abuse are constrained by staff shortages and lack of dialogue between parents and children. To begin to address physical abuse of children at home, a Trainer of Trainers workshop for Gender Peer Educators was held in July 2007, leading to a broader meeting among youth on

SGBV and physical abuse. Gender Training workshops were also held for all block leaders and teachers. In relation to schooling, discussions with the Ministry of Education for taking over schooling, as UNHCR's implementing partner is phasing out, are underway. A meeting with adolescents unable to continue to grades 11 and 12 was also held, to discuss possible opportunities. Due to constraints on staff, time and resources no action has been taken yet on vocational training.

"They (parents) give you what you need so you don't have to go out and sell yourself."

(Girl, aged 14-17)



III. LESSONS LEARNED

One of the most important lessons learned over the three years in which participatory assessments were carried out was that children have unique perspectives and insights into their problems, and must be consulted as part of any effort to improve conditions in refugee situations. Raising awareness of children's needs, rights and perspectives among adults – from partners working in the camps to parents and teachers – is an important outcome of the exercise and serves as a vital foundation from which to begin addressing children's problems and strengthening implementation of child rights.

Child refugees experience many of the same problems that are acute in most of Southern Africa, such as: widespread sexual and gender-based violence, inadequate information about HIV/AIDS, lack of knowledge of and respect for children's rights, weak social service delivery and the special vulnerability of orphans. Ethnic tensions that originated in countries or regions of origin appear to be exacerbated when these groups share the same refugee camp, while competition for scarce resources within most host countries is aggravated by the presence of refugee communities. These macro-level problems were reflected in many of the PAs, but do not lend themselves to rapid solutions. Thus an important lesson learned was that meeting the needs identified during PAs is a long-term process, but those involved have expectations of quick results. This issue needs to be better clarified with participants at the outset.



Police officers being trained in child participatory techniques

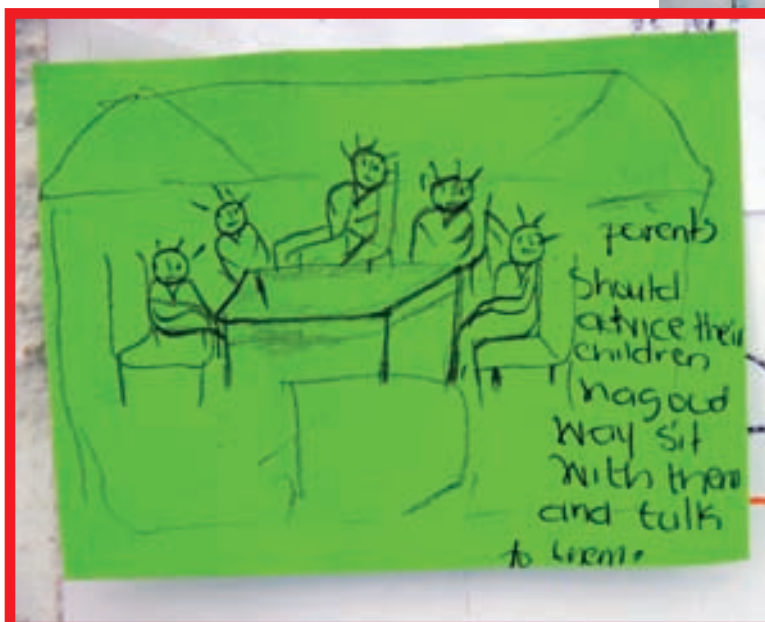
While children sometimes perceive themselves as powerless in the face of adult violence, discrimination and neglect, older children, in particular, want to participate actively in efforts to improve their living conditions. Children are very much aware of the problems they face, have devised their own protection strategies and have creative ideas about overcoming some of the pervasive problems mentioned above. Training youth with the skills to become peer educators – for example in areas such as SGBV and HIV prevention – appears to be an effective way of reaching young people.

Another lesson derived from the PA experience is the need to establish quantitative and qualitative indicators when action plans are defined, to serve as a base point from which to measure progress and impact.

The findings also pointed to a number of issues specifically related to children's refugee and returnee status and the administration of refugee and reintegration programmes that had not, in the past, been adequately considered, particularly:

- Failure to devote adequate attention to children and their need for protection against violence, as well as psychosocial attention and recreational opportunities.
- The need for more consistent and effective measures to overcome discrimination against refugee and returnee children by local communities and within camps.
- The unique situation and risks faced by unaccompanied and separated children.

In addition, during the course of the Participatory Assessment process UNHCR came to understand that while gathering information is very important, equal importance must be placed on building the capacity of those working in the camps to both protect and listen to children. The PAs made it clear that children had limited opportunities to voice their opinions and describe their problems, and that most felt a distinct lack of recourse when serious matters arose. Thus UNHCR has placed ever-greater emphasis on ensuring that camp and associated personnel are aware of issues facing children and able to respond appropriately.



As described above, UNHCR and its government and non-government partner agencies have begun to take steps to address these problems, and thus to fulfil the rights of refugee and returnee children.

Annex I: Participatory Assessment Methodology

Planning and Preparation

Planning for the Participatory Assessments called for consideration of four very important matters. The workshop *venue* should be one in which children feel safe to express themselves, and where there will be no interruptions, distractions, or onlookers. The *selection process* is also very important. Efforts were made to ensure that participants represented all of the different ethnic or other groupings in each setting, children both in and out of school, children with disabilities, and those in foster care, unaccompanied or separated from their family. Third, *group size* should be kept small. For most discussions boys and girls were in separate groups, requiring two facilitators, and in most cases interpreters were used. Efforts were made to keep the number of adults in each group at a minimum. Twelve children per group was considered the optimum size to ensure that each child is heard, but also that children do not tire from listening to too many inputs. Thus most PAs consisted of 24 children; two groups of 12, divided by age (10-to-13 and 14-17) and gender.

Finally, it is important that the *facilitators* selected are experienced in working with children and thus understand and are sensitive to the ethical issues involved in this work, particularly the principles of confidentiality and minimising harm. Training of local facilitators around these issues was seen as an important element of sustainability, creating a core of personnel working in the camps with greater awareness of and ability to communicate with children. Since the PAs touch on numerous sensitive topics – local police, ethnic conflict, teachers, etc. – it is crucial to ensure that tact and discretion are used when reporting the results to the larger community, and that no child be put at risk as a result of his or her statement. In addition, informed consent must be obtained from the parents or care givers of the children selected to participate and from the children themselves. All concerned must understand the purpose of the undertaking.

Building Trust

Given the sensitivity of the issues under discussion, it is vital that an atmosphere of trust be established among participants and between participants and facilitators. For these Participatory Assessments, adults and children were each given a nametag and addressed by first names, to create an informal atmosphere. Facilitators had received prior training in child-friendly methods: how to be warm and encouraging without being patronizing, how to encourage shy children to speak up, and how to respond when children become distressed during the course of a discussion. Age-appropriate games (including local games taught by children to facilitators) were used to break the ice at the beginning of the workshop, as well as to clear the air when tensions seemed to be mounting or emotions overflowing.

Art as a Communication Tool

Art was the central means for encouraging reflection and generating discussion. Children were given paper and crayons, and asked to carry out several drawing activities. On the first day they were asked to:

- Draw your home and everyone who lives in it with you.
- Draw the places where you go in a typical week.
- Draw the places where violence against children takes place.

After each such session, an hour was set aside during which each child could explain his/her drawing. At the end of the day, facilitators met to summarise the issues and solutions discussed during the day. On the second day, discussion of problems faced by the children continued through further drawing and discussion of:

- Special problems faced by refugee/returnee children.
- How children respond to the situations they describe.
- What solutions they suggest for coping with identified problems.

The use of drawing to elicit responses was found to be extremely effective, especially among children rarely asked to discuss their lives, experiences and opinions. To some extent it depersonalizes responses that might otherwise be embarrassing or sensitive, creating emotional distance. Children can draw a person, place or event without indicating whether or not it directly involves them. (For example: "Here is a stepfather raping his daughter.") Nonetheless, once trust was established, children were usually willing to identify the players in their drawings and discuss the details. The technique used during the workshops was "layering," in which children begin with a small piece of paper, and gradually build up a collage on a larger sheet of paper that reflects various aspects of their lives: home, school, religious institution, police, clinic, danger spots, etc. Gradually constructing this "picture" of their lives, while also listening to other children's explanations of their drawings, seemed to help participants reflect on the problems they face and possible solutions.



Disseminating Results

At the end of each workshop, children in the two groups joined together to present their issues, concerns and suggested solutions to each other, and then to a group of adults (parents, camp personnel, etc.). This was an important part of the process, aimed at ensuring that children's problems and ideas were communicated to those responsible for protecting them. In addition, an adult stakeholder spoke to the children to offer information on how to access help for the situations they had raised. Children were also encouraged to participate in the Action Plans that were to be developed by stakeholders following the workshops.

Shortly after each PA, UNHCR produced two reports: a comprehensive report highlighting the children's experiences of violence and recommendations for future action and a detailed documentation of the process for replication purposes and a small, colourful flyer (illustrated by the children's drawings) for the children who participated in the assessments as part of the report-back process. Children were assured that their ideas are being taken seriously and that steps would be taken to implement their recommendations.

