



COALITION TO STOP THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

CHILD SOLDIERS COALITION EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH TRUST Great Lakes Proposal 2008

Submitted to One Percent Scheme
31 January 2008

On behalf of the Child Soldiers Coalition and our partners in the Great Lakes we are extremely pleased to be nominated by the One Percent Scheme for support in 2008. OPS support in 2007 provided much-needed supplies to young girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), supporting their reintegration back into the community. For 2008 we are proposing a shift from our previous activity due to challenges that arose in providing supplies and funds directly to girls' rehabilitation centres. We provide a brief overview of the challenges we faced in 2007 followed by two projects that we invite OPS to support in 2008.

Challenges in 2007

The biggest challenge relates to how our partners view the Coalition's role in the region. By providing direct support to girls' rehabilitation centres, partners began to view the Coalition as a grant making body. Challenges arose when a limited number of organizations benefited from the project. This served to work against our efforts to establish national coalitions based on collaborative partnerships of local NGOs. It is through these coalitions that we seek to maximize the impact of our work with and for child soldiers, by conducting joint initiatives. In light of the challenges in implementation we have reviewed the lessons learned from this pilot project and would like to propose the following two projects to OPS Trustees for funding in 2008: a project in the Democratic Republic of Congo and one based in Uganda, with replication planned for the DRC later in 2008.

We acknowledge the need for increased and sustainable funding of our partners and their programs. We work to bridge this gap by continuing to lobby development funding bodies, such as the EU, for increased funding to local NGOs implementing Disarmament, Demobilization and Rehabilitation (DDR) programs in conflict affected regions. We provide support in identifying fundraising opportunities for our partners, and where possible we link partners directly to donors.

Proposal 1: Democratic Republic of the Congo – support to children's awareness raising activities

Thousands of children remain in the ranks of government forces and militias in the eastern DRC. Whilst hostilities are sporadic, the children risk death, injury, illness and trauma. Many of the girls have been raped and are caring for babies born in the ranks. The situation in North Kivu (eastern DRC) is particularly alarming with forced and voluntary recruitment and re-recruitment of children by all parties to the conflict (including from schools).

The DRC national coalition continues to expand its membership and its influence in the area of child protection with the establishment of sub-coalitions in key provinces affected by ongoing conflict. The Coalition will support the national coalition's members' efforts in advocating for the rights of children by conducting a series of public education campaigns at key child rights events throughout the year, such as Red Hand Day (February) and the Day of the African Child (June).

OPS funds will support the participation of children in these events. Activities will likely include: hosting screenings of coalition-produced documentaries on child soldiers, theatre plays addressing prevention strategies, children's poetry slam, street parades, and broadcasting key messages on local radio programs. In 2007 the Coalition's campaigns were hugely successful with large turnouts at all events including some 1,500 in attendance for screenings of the documentary "Enfants Soldats malgré eux" ("Child soldiers in spite of themselves"), including military officials.¹ With OPS support we will build on the success of 2007 and increase the participation of children in child rights campaigns throughout the year.

Proposal 2: Uganda – bringing the voices of formerly abducted children to reintegration

In Uganda, Coalition efforts are focused on raising awareness among local community leaders and fighting forces on the risks and consequences of child recruitment, based on national laws and international standards. We are currently pressing for lessons learned from previous reintegration programs to inform planning for the return and reintegration of approximately 2,000 women and children still with the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) in Southern Sudan and Eastern Congo.

In 2007 we conducted preliminary research in the Teso region of Uganda on the experiences of formerly abducted children in the return and reintegration process taking them back to their families and communities. The views and recommendations of 116 formerly abducted children have been compiled by an international child protection worker in Teso and analysis of the findings is currently being edited collaboratively with the Coalition's psycho-social consultant (the report will be published in early 2008).

The Coalition seeks to build on the initial findings of the Teso report to create an opportunity for the voices and experiences of formerly abducted children to be heard by stakeholders in the newly planned DDR program and to press for improvements in a currently inadequate system. The Coalition will conduct focus groups with children in key communities such as Kitgum (to be confirmed) in order to gain their perspectives and insight into the return and reintegration process (strengths, weaknesses, gaps). The recommendations will inform advocacy initiatives targeting those currently planning the DDR program (as part of agenda item 5 in the peace process) in Uganda such as Save the Children, UNICEF and World Vision to improve planning and long-term reintegration programming.² The distribution and dissemination of these recommendations to stakeholders and the public will increase awareness of the needs of children, especially vulnerable groups such as girls. We will work with local partners, Concerned Parents Association and international partners such as Save the Children and UNICEF.

After review of the project activities in Uganda we plan to carry out similar interviews in the DRC in 2008.

¹ This documentary was produced by member NGO AJEDI-ka.

² These are some of the key international agencies who led the return and reintegration process for the first phase of returning children from the LRA in Uganda.