

Trinidad and Tobago

Country Report

Presented by

Alexa Khan

Coordinator of the National Plan of Action for Children

THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT, SPORT AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS

The **Ministry Of Community Empowerment, Sport And Consumer Affairs** is the government agency responsible for coordinating implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the National Plan of Action for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. The Ministry's portfolio includes responsibility for:

- National Family Services
- Probation Services
- Industrial Schools and Orphanages
- Foster Care
- Adoption
- Disability Affairs
- Social Welfare
- Poverty Eradication and Equity Building
- National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme
- Community Mediation Services
- Community Services

STRATEGIES AND/OR PLANS TO PREVENT AND COMBAT SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

As a signatory to the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and having ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago initiated action in March 1993 on the UN Commission on Human Rights: **Programme of Action for the**

Prevention of the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. As a consequence, this country's initiatives to prevent and combat commercial sexual exploitation of children commenced prior to the First World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm, 1996. In fact, the stipulations of the **Stockholm Agenda** strengthened the Government's resolve to formulate and implement a comprehensive plan of action to address all aspects of the commercial sexual exploitation of children. In this regard, the following measures were identified for implementation between 1995-2000:

Short Term measures – Five year time frame

1. Establishment of the then **Ministry of Social Development** as the national focal point specifically mandated to:

- Collect data on the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography
- Facilitate networking between governments, NGOs, the community, the business sector, the family and children;
- Facilitate implementation of the programme of action with an emphasis on the development of prevention strategies;
- Development of a specific agenda for regional cooperation

2. Increasing the services of the police force, through the establishment of juvenile bureaux throughout the country;

Medium and Long-Term Measures

The Government committed to:

- Reappraise its development strategies so as to ensure greater equity, income distribution and resource allocation for vulnerable children and their families;
- Increase the level of assistance provided to needy families and children in difficult circumstances in order to break the cycle of poverty, since poverty is recognized as a primary contributing factor to the exploitation of children. In this regard, we acknowledge that monitoring of parental behaviour, supervision by social service personnel, access to occupational facilities, provision of family care and child subsidies and universal access to education and retraining are required to encourage behavioural change in parents as well as to protect children.
- Re-orient incentives from the past emphasis on 'economic investment' to social investment targeted to development of the child and family.
- Foster changes to traditions which perpetuate child exploitation, not only through legislative enactment but also through establishing a broader socialization and education process targeted towards consciousness raising and behavioural changes.

Implementation mechanisms

A multisectoral approach to implementation of the plan envisaged:

- A collaborative approach to policy making and strategy development, spearheaded by the focal point agency and inclusive of the views of all stakeholders; NGOs, the business

sector and religious organizations, among others.

- Strategy implementation to be spearheaded by the relevant NGOs, governmental agencies and the private sector. For example, programmes within the education sector would be facilitated by the Ministry of Education.
- The focal point would monitor and evaluate the strategies pursued by all sectors.

In the context of this plan, an exploratory Survey into the nature and extent of Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Sale of Children was commissioned in August 1995 to derive baseline data on the manifestations of the phenomena. It was envisaged that the findings of the report would inform the development of a targeted programme of action. A final report was submitted in June 1997, however, it suffered from many of the problems encountered by researchers globally:

- ❖ The 'invisibility' of child prostitution and child pornography was a major obstacle to quantifying the extent of commercial sexual exploitation in Trinidad and Tobago;
- ❖ The major data inputs were subjective rather than emerging from a systematic data collection system.

Despite these limitations, Cabinet agreed in 1999, that:

- Public awareness programmes be conducted on the existence of commercial sexual exploitation of children in Trinidad and Tobago;
- Law enforcement agencies should be sensitized to the seriousness of the phenomena addressed in the survey as criminal activity and that stiffer penalties be imposed for such offences;

- Measures be instituted for the systematic collection and analysis of data with respect to the incidence of commercial sexual exploitation of children; and
- Further in-depth and expansive research into the phenomena be undertaken to inform programme formulation in those areas.

SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMMES OR PROJECTS IN THE SELECTED AREA

Credo Foundation for Justice

The Credo Foundation for Justice (a nongovernmental organization) in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GORTT) established the ***Credo Centre for Socially Displaced Children*** in June 1997. The primary objective of the Centre is to reduce the number of children who live and/or work on the street. The target population is street and other at risk children up to 17 years of age. The centre offers food, clothing, counseling and remedial services, a self development programme, opportunity for reintegration with school and family and emergency and short term night accommodation. Since its establishment in 1997, two hundred (200) boys have been reintegrated either with their families and/or back into the school system or have been referred to a range of apprenticeship training and/or adolescent development programmes. Adolescents, in whose best interest, a return to home is not an option, are referred to a transitional centre for independent living.

Project coordinators credit the success of the programme to:

- ✓ The stakeholder based approach to programme development. The needs and specific situations of the children informed the design of the programme at each stage and resulted in a final

product much different from that originally envisaged.

- ✓ The generally professional approach reflected in a clear philosophy, values and goals, a dedicated core of committed and generous staff, and an integrated developmental programme including self awareness, spirituality, recreation, inclusion of family members in therapy and building community awareness of the problem.
- ✓ Establishment of prevention programmes drawing on parental education and skills training. These programmes are aimed at both families in crisis and at risk families;
- ✓ A home affirming environment in which children are made to feel comfortable and in which corporal punishment is prohibited;

Constraints: Co-ordinators cite lack of support systems as the major obstacle to effective programme implementation. Referral facilities for children with special needs, counseling services, and long term care facilities are some of the areas that are inadequate. In addition, it was felt that the Police Service needed to be sensitised to child rights issues and trained to deal with children in conflict with the law.

Youth Outreach Programme

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA T&T) established a Youth Outreach Programme in 1995 targeting street children and at risk youth in Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad and Tobago. The stated objectives of the programme are:

- Provision of a safe, nurturing environment for children;
- The provision of counselling, medical and legal services;
- The provision of scholarships to children to attend vocational training programmes;

- Establishment of a mentor programme-big brother, big sister
- The promotion of rehabilitative and educational activities for parents/guardians of children at risk;
- Educating children about their rights;
- Rehabilitation of street children to develop leadership qualities and self esteem
- Networking and coordination with other agencies to improve the situation of street children;
- The conduct of public awareness campaigns on the plight of street children;
- The formation of community youth groups to enhance community empowerment, youth leadership and employment opportunities; and
- To act as a liaison between families and youth.

The programme targets adolescents between the ages of 13 to 19 who are either peer initiated into the programme or referred by the Ministry of Education. The Programme Coordinator estimates that over the six years of operation, an estimated 400 boys have accessed the programme.; 15% of participants have achieved trade certificates, are involved in youth camps or vocational schools and/or have been reintegrated into the formal school system. The effectiveness of the programme reflects the fact that youth participation has been pivotal to development of the programme at each stage; the programme focussed on inculcating individual and community responsibility, social and communication skills through recreational therapy, and significantly, the provision of a youth friendly space.

The programme has not been as effective in its efforts to reintegrate 'street youth' into mainstream society. One of the major constraints, in this regard, has been the lack of a positive social support system in the families and communities of participants. The inability

or unwillingness of parents or guardians to accept adolescents and support their changed outlook as well as negative peer pressure within the community, erode some of the gains achieved in the programme. Effective reintegration is further compounded by ingrained societal perceptions of 'street youth' as unworthy, contemptible and pitiful. Such perceptions often leave them vulnerable to mistreatment and abuse by employers, for example. Both the lack of a positive support network and negative societal perceptions result in disillusionment with the social system and erosion of the self-esteem, social skills and motivation built by the programme.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the Youth Outreach Programme is serving a need within the national community and efforts are being made to expand the services to central and south Trinidad and Tobago.

The Rap Port

The Rap Port Youth Information and Outreach Centre was established in 1995 to mitigate the rising incidence of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases within the youth population. Considered the youth arm of the National AIDS Programme of the Ministry of Health, the Centre targets both in and out of school youth in the age range 13 to 25 years, and focuses on the provision of information, education, counselling and referral services, through peer to peer interaction. The stated objectives of the Centre are to:

- ❖ Make relevant social support services available;
- ❖ Empower young people with skills which would enable them to negotiate safe sexual relationships;
- ❖ Increase knowledge of safer practices which include delaying the start of sexual activity, reducing participation in casual sex and increasing knowledge of proper condom use;

- ❖ Increase youth skills regarding sexual risk reduction behaviour.

These objectives are operationalized through:

- Communication skills and self development programmes;
- Individual and family counselling;
- Problem solving skills
- Referrals to supportive agencies;
- Lecture/discussions;
- Video presentations
- Popular theatre
- Rap sessions
- Presentation of interactive programmes via the electronic media; specifically through radio stations whose primary audience is youth and through television programmes broadcasted by the National Broadcasting Network.

Between 1995 to 1999, the Centre's services were accessed by:

- ❖ 5,678 youth through the in-house programme;
- ❖ 158,940 youth through the outreach programme. Pre-schools, primary and secondary schools, Parent/Teacher Associations, Health Centres, community Groups, vocational centres, police youth groups, community spaces, Non-governmental organizations, religious institutions and workplaces have all been targeted for information exchange and discussion; and
- ❖ 554 youth via telephone;

Through their ongoing relationship with a core group of beneficiaries of the programme, peer educators are convinced that the programme has had a positive impact on the incidence of STDs and HIV/AIDS, particularly through the focus on raising awareness of HIV/AIDS and STDs in the targeted age group and the empowerment of young people to negotiate safe sexual relationships. In collaboration with UNICEF, the programme is due to be ex-

panded with the creation of seven (7) Rap Port Centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago. It is also envisaged that an estimated 500 young people from within the specific communities will be trained as peer educators to service these centres.

MECHANISMS USED FOR OBTAINING FINANCES

Each of the programmes highlighted receive some level of funding from the GORTT. Both the capital and recurrent expenditure of the Credo Centre for Socially Displaced Children are funded by Government subvention through the Ministry of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs. The Rapport is funded through the Ministry of Health as part of the National AIDS Programme. Approximately 20% of the recurrent expenditure of the Youth Outreach Programme (YMCA) is funded by Government subvention. In 2001, however the programme was primarily funded by the J.P. Fernandes Memorial Foundation.

PROGRAMME EXPERIENCES AND THE STOCKHOLM PLAN OF ACTION

The aforementioned programmes clearly suggest that:

- all stakeholders recognize that a child centred approach/child rights perspective to programme formulation and delivery is critical to effective programme implementation;
- peer education programmes are among the most successful communication strategies when dealing with children and youth;
- cooperation and collaboration among all stakeholders-public, private and civil society - is crucial to prevention of commercial sexual exploitation and

to reintegration of child victims of commercial sexual exploitation;

- education and social mobilization are also crucial to addressing the primary contributory factors to commercial sexual exploitation;
- the State accepts its primary responsibility to combat commercial sexual exploitation in all of its modalities.

In spite of this, the GORTT acknowledges that more needs to be done regarding:

- establishment of an effective data collection system to ensure systematic monitoring and timely intervention;
- development of cross-sectoral prevention and protection strategies;
- promotion of gender sensitive national social and economic policies and programmes to assist children, families and communities vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation, in resisting acts that lead to exploitation of children.;
- targeting of individuals and groups involved in exploitative practices with information, education and outreach programmes to promote behavioural changes to counter the practice;
- strengthening of laws, policies and programmes that protect child victims from being penalized as criminals, and also establish the criminal responsibility of service providers, customers and intermediaries in child prostitution, child pornography, including possession of child pornography
- all areas promoting recovery and reintegration and child participation.

OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION

Formulation of a plan of action consistent with the Stockholm Agenda was constrained by:

- the difficulties encountered in timely completion of the survey on the extent of child prostitution, pornography and sale of children;
- the 'invisibility' of the phenomena ensured its low priority by policy makers relative to other social problems such as violence in schools, for example;

PROBLEMS, WHICH FAVOUR THE OCCURRENCE OF AND INCREASE IN COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN.

In the preparation of this report, a review of the studies¹ completed to date relevant to the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and interviews with a range of pertinent stakeholders² were conducted. This brief review reflected the following:

1. In Trinidad and Tobago, commercial sexual exploitation of children has been identified in the following contexts:
 - Children and adolescents involved in formal prostitution, primarily girls;
 - Adolescents involved in prostitution within the school system;
 - Runaway adolescent girls who are recruited from 'the street' and 'kept' by older men;
 - Children and adolescents who are sexually abused, within the home by the 'breadwinner'/stepfather or other adult relative. The mothers of these children feel powerless or are unwilling to intervene due to economic vulnerability;
 - Sexual exploitation of primarily male street children;
 - Adolescent boys and girls involved in sex tourism in Tobago;
 - School girls who establish sexual relationships with 'minibus' men/taxi drivers in exchange for free trans-

portation, 'designer' clothes, jewellery, food and other material possessions.

Data reflecting the actual number of children involved in prostitution and the distribution within the aforementioned categories is still non-existent since:

- Previous research efforts were qualitative and to a large extent inconclusive;
- Findings have been based on anecdotal data because no state or non governmental agencies collect data on child prostitution or pornography;

Despite this, there is general agreement among stakeholders that commercial sexual exploitation is growing. The situation of adolescent school girls and minibuss drivers is particularly alarming since this phenomenon has been identified across socio-economic strata and geographic boundaries. Key informants suggest that it is now part of the secondary school culture in Trinidad and Tobago.

Several contributing factors giving rise to the emergence and growth of commercial sexual exploitation have been identified as follows:

¹ Survey into the nature and extent of child prostitution, child pornography and sale of children (1997) UNICEF Situational Analysis of Children and their Families (Draft 1997), UNICEF Situational Analysis of Twelve Countries of the Caribbean Region (Draft May 2001)

² Credo Foundation For Justice, YMCA, The Rapport, The Chief Probation Officer, The Community Police Division, The National Family Services.

Regional Governmental Congress on Sexual Exploitation of Children

Modalities of Commercial Sexual Exploitation	Contributing Factors ¹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Children and adolescents involved in formal prostitution, primarily girls. Network of nightclubs, brothels, fashion houses and dating and escort services; ❖ Runaway adolescent girls who are recruited of the street and 'kept' by older men; ❖ Children and adolescents who are sexually abused, within the home by the 'breadwinner'/stepfather or other relative. The mothers of these children feel powerless or are unwilling to intervene due to economic vulnerability; ❖ Sexual exploitation (prostitution and pornography) of primarily male street children; ❖ Adolescent boys and girls involved in sex tourism in Tobago; ❖ Adolescent girls involved in prostitution within the school system; ❖ School girls who establish sexual relationships with 'minibus'/taxi drivers in exchange for free transportation, designer clothes, jewellery, food and other material possessions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dysfunctional family situation - Poverty - Sexual abuse/incest within home - Domestic violence - Promiscuity or prostitution among mothers - Drug addiction among parents - Drug addiction among girls - Youth subculture heavily influenced by North American 'gangster rap' and consumer culture driving the need to acquire designer brands - Consumer Pressure. Marketing campaigns target adolescents from all socio-economic strata and consequently perpetuate the need to acquire designer clothing and accessories regardless of financial status. - Parental neglect - Peer Pressure

Each of the factors identified contributes to the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Trinidad and Tobago. These factors have been found to be inter-linked in a complex dynamic which continues to bewilder policy makers in their attempts to address the issue. The very complexity of the issue, however underscores the need to formulate and implement a plan of action through an integrated and collaborative approach.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If we agree that the commercial sexual exploitation of even one child deserves action, then we must also concur that the lack of credible data should not constrain the formulation of a programme of action to combat this phenomena. What is required therefore is the elaboration of strategies that simultaneously target prevention, recovery and reintegration on several levels. Additionally, in light of the 'shadowy' nature of commercial sexual exploitation, **social mobilization aimed at raising awareness of the problem is crucial**, particularly in cultural contexts unwilling to acknowledge existence of the problem. Recognition and acceptance of the problem is really the first step toward addressing this issue effectively.

Programmes of action based on the Stockholm Agenda should elaborate measurable indicators for each aspect of the plan of action. In addition, information sharing regarding reliable research methodologies, and successful programme experiences should be facilitated to ensure the development of efficient and effective strategies.