Contributions of Rochas Foundation, Child Care Trust and Complementary Rapid Education Programme in Reaching Children and Youth at Risk in Africa (1994 - 2006)

By

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Abstract
The Rights of children and youth all over the world especially in Africa are being violated on daily basis predisposing them to living with factors that expose them to risk. This paper examines the concept of risk and what risk factors entail in relation to children and youth not being able to develop into fulfilled adults. It also examines the contributions of two non-governmental organizations – the Rochas Foundation (RF) and the Child Care Trust (CCT) both in Nigeria and, the Complementary Rapid Education Programme (CREP) in Sierra Leone at reaching the children and youth at risk in Africa between 1994 and 2006. Children and youths affected by poverty, disabilities and violent wars are the focus of these organizations and programme. In concluding, the paper noted that neurological, environmental and sociological factors among others are putting children in Africa at risk. It is therefore recommended that programmes like CREP should be encouraged in nations that are affected by war and rich individuals, especially the political class should focus helping the poor in the society.

Introduction

There is no gain saying the fact that children and youth all over the world, especially in Africa, are facing a hard time, most especially those from poor homes, those that are challenged with disabilities and those from war torn nations. There is grave violation of all rights of children and as a result most children are engaged in hard labour, many are held captive in commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking, many lack access to basic needs of life and good education (Obasanjo 2000). The worst hit are those who are challenged with disabilities and are often thrown out into the streets by families to depend on begging to make ends meet, thus exposing them to risks.

Section viii, Article 41 of Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) adopted by the 25th session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS in Dakar, Senegal states tha

1. Member States shall guarantee children's rights and give them access to basic education.
2. Special law shall be enacted in each Member State and at the level of the community against child trafficking and child prostitution
3. The Community shall adopt laws and regulations on Child Labour in line with the provisions of the International Labour Organizations

But a recent report of United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization in 2007 (FAO) shows that out of 218 million children worldwide about 132 million, some as young as five years old, are forced to work in the agricultural sector. Launching a new initiative to mark the UN World Day against Child Labour, the FAO said the child labourers were being deprived of education, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. (The Punch June 13, 2007 p.26) This type of report by world organizations shows that more efforts are needed to reach children and youth at risk in Africa. In the midst of abuse of the rights of children and youth, various government policies and some non-governmental organizations have made positive contributions towards reaching and rescuing children and youth at risk.

This paper centered its discussion on two non-governmental organizations – Rochas Foundation (RF) and Child Care Trust (CCT) - both in Nigeria and, a government programme –Complementary Rapid Education Programme (CREP) in Sierra Leone. These organizations and programme have been chosen for study because of the uniqueness of their contributions at reaching children and youth at risk in Africa. Rochas Foundation (RF), established by Owelle Rochas Okorocha, is a non-governmental and non-profit making organization set out to reach and reduce the number of children and youth that are at risk or would have been at risk. This is because they are children from extremely poor homes and they could not further their education after primary school. The objective of the Foundation is achieved through the provision of comprehensive free secondary education and other means of support like cash and material donations to other homes caring for such children and youth.

The Child Care Trust (CCT) another non-governmental and non-profit making organization on the other hand, through various programmes and services, focuses on the challenged children who otherwise would have been at risk because of their disabilities. This organization is unique because it is catering for children and youth with multiple disabilities like the hearing impaired, the physically impaired, the mentally retarded, and even the children from poor homes who could not afford the cost of primary education.

Complementary Rapid Education Programme (CREP) was a programme executed in Sierra Leone after the end of the ten year civil war that ravaged the nation living many over-aged children and youth without basic education and putting them at risk of not being able to develop into useful adults. The vision, objectives, facilities, services and contributions of these organizations and policy are discussed in this paper to appraise their place in the history of education.

The Concept of Risk

Risk in reference to children and youth, according to the Michigan's Children Department (2002) is a "circumstance, influence or behaviour that militates against young persons growing in their cognitive, social, emotional or physical ability into a well adapted adult". The Department further claimed that a multitude of risk factors have been identified and categorized as external and internal.

a External factors include growing up impoverished, having inadequate health care,
being abused or neglected, or residing in unsafe neighbourhood, while;

b Internal factors are lifestyle decision made by a young person such as deciding to smoke, abuse substances, become sexually active at an early age or engage in violent or criminal activities.

One could therefore say that despite the distinction, both internal and external factors affect young children greatly and can influence the rest of their life, including their later lifestyle decisions.

According to Schonert-Reichl (2000), descriptions of children and youth at risk had been around for many years. To him, although the precise origin of the term "at risk" appears to be somewhat obscure, the concept must have had its roots both in Medicine and Education. He further claimed that some researchers use the "at risk" label to identify children and youth who possess one or more risk factors, such as a genetic predisposition for a disorder or low socioe-conomic status, while others utilize outward signs of failure and distress, such as truancy, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, depression, and suicide to identify children and youth at risk. On the other hand, Dryfoos (1990) states that, the "at risk" label should be applied to those individuals who are not maturing into responsible adults. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD: 1995) supported Dryfoos' idea by giving operational definition of "at risk" as those failing in school and as a result are unable to function in adulthood roles or make a full contribution to active society. Although most of OECD member countries agreed that the label should focus on those children and youth identified as socially disadvantaged, some countries also included those children with disabilities with particular reference to those with physical and mental handicaps.

Children and Youth at Risk in Africa

UNICEF (1999) recorded that 130 million primary school age children have no access to education and therefore no means by which to pull themselves up out of the circle of poverty and give their own children a better chance. Most affected in this case according to (Ogbebor, 2006 & Ogungbemi, 2006) are the physically challenged, street children, children of destitute, the mentally retarded, orphans, children from poor socio economic background and children who are victims of war. In Africa, the treatment of the challenged has a strange cultural background which makes them to be at risk. Adults are often embarrassed by malformed children and families hide them away believing the disability to be a form of curse (McDonald & Garrow 2000 p.46). Some people even say that it is not good for a pregnant woman to see somebody who is badly deformed because this may affect her pregnancy. Such children are usually unattended to while a host of them have suffered abuse or murder. Stigmatization and

neglect is still the order of the day in the world of such children and youth today thus making them to be at risk in Africa.

As we consider the needs of Africa today, we can not ignore the fact that there are more children and youth than ever before implying that more children and youth than ever before are at risk. According to UNICEF (1999) at the turn of this millennium, almost one third of the world's population is under age 15; that is 1.8 billion. Of all the children born today, 80 per cent live in developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America and some parts of Europe where extreme poverty is prevalent. As 97 per cent of world population growth takes place in the developing world, especially in Africa, multitude of children and youth will endure a life of high social risk.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) in the 2006 Global Report on Child Labour given in Addis Ababa on Monday April 23, 2007 singles out Africa as the major world region with the least progress in tackling child labour, and where the number of child workers actually increased over the period covered by the report. The ILO Director General adds that in Nigeria and Ghana, over 6000 child workers were withdrawn, rehabilitated and re-integrated into the society (The Punch April 24 2007 p.10).

One can therefore argue that risk in the African context is a complex issue because it involves the following factors;

a. Environmental, (e.g. living in an unsafe neighbourhood, being abused or neglected, not having access to basic needs of life, wars, violent riots etc.)
b. Neurological (e.g. low IQ, congenital diseases, mental illness) and
c. Social (e.g. rejection by peers, socio-historical and political ideologies that lead to stereotypes, choosing risky life style, poor socio-economic background etc.)

Therefore, there is growing consensus that identifying, preventing and ameliorating risk must begin in early childhood rather than waiting until later, when the results manifest themselves, and this is the reason why governmental and non-governmental organizations such as the Rochas Foundation, Child Care Trust and, the Complementary Rapid Education Pragramme (CREP) in Sierra Leone, have directed their efforts at assisting children and youth at risk in Africa.

The Rochas Foundation (RF)

Rochas Foundation, (RF) a non-profit humanitarian organization, was established in 1994 with its headquarters in Owerri, Imo state, Nigeria. This Foundation started as a family affair in which Rochas Okorocha's family organized cook-out, served food and gift items around churches and mosques to disabled persons and the needy in Jos, Owerri and Abuja, all in Nigeria. According to the founder;

> *Rochas Foundation is not a display of wealth or affluence but a fulfillment of my covenant with God Almighty. I have asked one thing of my creator, to bless me that I may bless others, to honour me that I may honour others, to give me that I may share with those who do not have, to feed me that I may feed those who hunger and thirst, because on my own I can do nothing, but I can do all things through Him that strengthens me….(RFC Brochure p.1)*

Vision of the Foundation

The major vision of the Foundation is to alleviate the plight of the handicapped and the less privileged. This is done through provision of free and comprehensive secondary school education and accommodation for the children of the poorest of the poor, giving hope to the hopeless and sensitization of the populace on health issues e.g. HIV/AIDS prevention.

The Foundation's main focus is providing technical and financial assistance to the less privileged in the society in various forms like interest-free loans, medical assistance, scholarship schemes, job placement programmes, special talent schemes, life pension benefits for the aged and, education which is a priority of the Foundation in reducing the numbers of children and youth at risk. Rochas himself had grown up in abject poverty and was one of the thousands of African children who had to pass through difficulties to obtain basic education. He knows and shares the pains which the children of the poorest of the poor have to go through to obtain basic education in Africa and he 'questioned what he saw'

I see injustice and I ask why not justice
I see poverty and I ask why not affluence
I see the less privileged and I say why not the Rochas Foundation
I see indigent children unable to acquire education and I say why not the Rochas Foundation College.

(The Rochas Foundation website, http://www.rochasfoundation.org/ aboutus.htm)

The vision and thoughts of Rochas metamorphosed into the establishment of Rochas Foundation College (RFC) for the purpose of providing free and comprehensive secondary education for children of the poorest of the poor in the Nigeria and other West African sub-region. The school was first established in Owerri, Imo state, Nigeria, on October 8, 2001 with an initial intake of 200 less privileged children – boys and girls who have lost the hope of going to school and were at risk. Over 75% of the students were orphans who were engaged in street hawking or house help jobs, usually resulting to child abuse.

Today, Rochas Foundation runs five of such schools located in various parts of Nigeria namely; Kano, Owerri, Ogboko, Ibadan and Jos, with population of almost 3000 students. Education in these colleges is free in its totality. Students are provided books, accommodation, (for boarding students) transportation to and from school, three square meals including mid-day meals, school uniforms and sports wares, free medical care and monthly pocket money of #150.00 for the Senior Prefects, #120.00 for the Prefects and #100.00 for all other students.

The curriculum of the college is comprehensive and incorporates all the subjects in the Nigeria National Policy on Education – the sciences, arts, social sciences, religion and computer education backed with fully equipped study libraries, laboratories, visual and graphic teaching aids. The teaching staff are picked from among the best with commensurate qualification and highly recommended by institutions or individuals. The colleges have non-academic departments where students are taught to acquire gainful skills. The tailoring department makes all the school uniforms as well as teaching students how to sew.

Also in each of the colleges, two students are selected for academic summer holiday in the United States of America, thus giving them a life time opportunity of travelling and making friends and enjoying what the children of the affluent in the society enjoy. The Rochas Foundation is currently building a university in Ogboko which will be free for all Rochas Foundation College graduates who intend to further their education and the project is expected to be completed by 2008.

Contributions of Rochas Foundation at Reaching Children and Youth at Risk in Africa

Between 2001 and 2006 the Rochas Foundation has provided free and comprehensive secondary education for about 3000 children of the poorest of the poor, the orphans, the abandoned and those children who had lost every hope of access to basic formal education due to poverty, and would have been on the streets as hawkers and labourers. This was attested to by a letter of appreciation written by one of the students (Ogba Kingsley) published in one of the brochures of the Foundation, and which is quoted in part below:

> *…Daddy, my appreciation lies most on the fact that I am privileged to go to a secondary school and the way my life has been totally transformed for good … if not for you who knows what I would have ended doing or who I would have ended up being? Is it one of the pure water hawkers along the road? Being a Casanova even at my age or even a criminal? But … today, I am one of your children and have value in the society. (RFC Brochure p.18)*

Apart from the academic work, Rochas Foundation Colleges have successfully equipped the students with non-academic skills in fashion designing and agriculture. The college in Owerri acquired 250 hectares of farm land for the cultivation of basic food crops. Students are exposed to practical agriculture and this will surely influence career choice of these students later in life. The farm also serves as a recreation centre for the students.

The RF annual Reach Out and Touch Programme called 'ROTOP' has also reached children and youth at risk in the society. It sponsored Spinal Bifida surgery at the National Hospital in Abuja in 2002 for a little baby and kidney transplant for another young man. But for this intervention the story of these people would have been different.

The RF also has its annual "de-stigmatization through interaction" programme where it reaches out to those infected by the HIV/AIDS virus especially the less privileged and offers them a helping hand in terms of drugs, food and other necessities.

In Nigeria, the 'almajiris' (young boys from very poor homes who depend solely on begging for survival, some with primary education or without education at all, and are recruited by selfish groups or individuals to fight during violent clashes against oppositions) has constituted a great problem in Nigeria, especially in the Northern Region. Apart from being at risk themselves, the 'almajiris' constitute a security risk to the society. However, with the establishment of two of the Rochas College in the North –Kano and Jos-the number of the 'almajiris' has been reduced by enrolment into the colleges.

Some of the students (particularly the orphans and homeless) are also given accommodation, school uniforms, house wares, shoes, food and all other materials are provided for the children free, thereby helping them to grow up like other children from privileged homes. All these provisions reduced the risk that these children and youth would have faced in the society.

Motherless babies' homes are not left out of the ROTOP. The Programme offers cash, and other useful materials as gifts to such homes in various locations in Nigeria to enable them take proper care of these children, some of who will find their ways into the Rochas College after primary education.

Child Care Trust (CCT)

The problem of the handicapped children and youth taking to street begging is a common feature of the African society. It became a serious problem to the extent that a national conference had to be organized in 1972 for the rehabilitation of beggars in Nigeria. There it was observed that raising funds for the rehabilitation of physically and mentally handicapped children yields little. Many people in Africa, it was observed, do not give adequate support for such activities and the health care facilities are also inadequate to reduce drastically the causes of disabilities in children (Jones 1944 & Okediji 1972). But in the past few years, few initiatives address the special needs of disabled children in Africa; one of such is the Child Care Trust.

The Child Care Trust is a non-governmental and non-profit making organization established in Abuja, Nigeria by late Stella Obasanjo, the wife of former Nigeria President Olusegun Obasanjo on the 9th May, 2000. This is to equip the challenged children with life supportive skills in order to assist them in the realization of their inherent potentials through the application of their innate creativity for exploits in their respective lives.

The Focus of Child Care Trust (CCT)

The focus of CCT is to provide centre based education and care for moderately and severely disabled children, with the purpose of enhancing the development of these children to the fullest possible level; in order to establish a solid foundation for subsequent education and vocational development. This is probably in line with Article 22 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that; A mentally or physically challenged child should enjoy a full and decent life in condition which ensures dignity, promote self reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community. Simply put a disabled child is entitled to a normal active life which would enable him / her to grow and become a self reliant adult.

The Major Objectives of Child Care Trust (CCT)

Among the major objectives of CCT are;

1. Supporting existing institutions through human and organizational capacity building,

2. Providing medical, social and mental development services for all children especially the handicapped.

3. Maintaining a data bank which will serve as a repertoire of information on the handicap and also provide materials for social researchers into problems associated with children with disabilities in the country.

4. Conducting researches in all areas of disability and its management and serve as a networking center and clearing house of information on early childhood issues, policies, programmes and organizations and as a lead agency for an early childhood education strategy.

5. Providing academic and vocational skills that will empower the challenged children for a sustainable livelihood.

6. Leading advocacy for social integration of the challenged children in the country through exemplary operation of the CCT Model Centre (Obasanjo 2002 p.7).

CCT Services and Facilities

CCT has the following services and facilities:

1. **The Special Education Programme (SEP) or Special School:** This is an approved school for children and youth ages two to fifteen (2-15) who are challenged with varying levels of physical, cognitive and emotional functioning. The complement of services offered cover the full range of educational facilities designed for children with emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties who otherwise would not succeed in the main stream of traditional public school setting. Comprehensive remedial education programmes in academics, pre-vocational skills and independent living are provided to ensure that the needs of these special children are met. The school has four groups of students/units.

   a. Hearing Impaired Students – Deaf and Dumb

   b. Intellectually Impaired Students which comprises

      i. Mentally Retarded (MR) children.

      ii. Autistic children – children with mental disorderliness, withdrawn children who can't think or dress up by themselves, they drip saliva and their central nervous system is uncontrollable.

      iii. Children with cerebral palsy – Down's syndrome (these children stand at higher risk because they can't resist any move to put them at risk and parents use to abandon them. Some have been killed through "mercy killing" (i.e. killing them out of pity.)

   c. Physically Impaired (PI) children – children on wheel chairs and clutches probably caused by polio, accident, or wrong injection – and the Integrated children (Normal children from at Risk in Africa)

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   d. Multiple Disabled children e.g. deaf/wheel chair, deaf/wheel chair/mentally retarded.

2. **Computer Literacy and Internet Training Centre**: The Bess Abebe-Abiola Computer Center for challenged children is fully equipped and offers computer training to disabled youths from disadvantaged families

3. **HIV/AIDS Orphans and Vulnerable Children Scholarship Scheme:** HIV/AIDS Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) are children who have lost one or both parents as a result of HIV/AIDS pandemic, and children infected by HIV/AIDS. The HIV/AIDS Orphans Scholarship Programme provides free primary and secondary education, through scholarships. The programme also aims at providing genuine antiretroviral drugs to children infected with HIV/AIDS. It is being implemented in partnership with the National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA) of Nigeria, Pan African Children's Fund, USA and other stakeholders. It has offered scholarship to 50 OVC in the 2004/2005 academic year and 370 by 2005/2006 with 10 OVC coming from each state and the Federal Capital Territory.

4. **Counselling Unit:** Counselling for parents of challenged children, speech therapy for children, HIV/AIDS training for school children, seminars and workshops for care givers and stakeholders are regularly organized by the Trust.

5. **Vocational training center:** where children and adults alike learn life-sustaining skills such as tailoring, bread making and hair dressing.

6. CCT in partnership with 'Save-a-Child's Heart Nigeria', University of Ibadan also runs a heart examination centre for children with heart defects. Under this partnership, Child Care Trust procured an echocardiograph machine which was installed and commissioned in April 2001 and in use by the University.

The Contributions of CCT at Reaching Children and Youth at Risk in Africa

In the past, the Centre had catered for and is still catering for the challenged children through the combined and coordinated use of medical, social, education and vocational services to enable the children who could have turned beggars and constitute a nuisance in the society, to function at their maximum level. As at the time of writing this paper, the CCT center Abuja has:

- 45 Hearing Impaired (HI) children
- 34 Physically Impaired (PI) plus the Integrated Group
- 26 Intellectually Impaired (II) or Mentally Retarded (MR) children and youth in various classes receiving free education, healthcare, feeding, uniforms, accommodation, and most importantly, emotional and psychological care.

These children and youth are given hope in their supposed hopeless situations. It should be noted that it is not an easy task taking care of 105 children and youth with various disabilities, and that is why CCT is very unique. The table below shows the students group and level.

Table 1: Students' Group and Level of Education

Group	Pre School.	1st Year Primary	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year	5th Year	6th Year	Total
	M F	M F	M F	M F	M F	M F	M F	
Hearing Impaired	8 6	5 2	9 2	2 -	2 4	1 2	1 1	45
Physically Impaired & Integrated Group	2 5	3 3	1 2	2 6	3 1	3 3	- -	34
	Grade 1	Grade 2						
Intellectually Impaired Or Mentally Retarded	12	14						26
Grand Total								**105**

Source: CCT Student Admission Records (2007)

The HIV/AIDS Orphans and Vulnerable Children scholarship schemes of the CCT have also offered scholarships to some of these children, thus giving them the opportunity to be educated, like their privileged counterparts. In most African societies, orphans are neglected and most relatives do not bother about their well-being talk less of giving them education, this may be probably due to the prevalent poverty in the society emanating at times from the polygamous marriage culture, with families having more children than what they can cater for. It now becomes absolutely impossible or difficult for such relatives of the OVC to lend a helping hand, but CCT has filled the gap for some of these children.

Complementary Rapid Education Programme (CREP) in Sierra Leone

Another relevant programme at reaching children and youth at risk in Africa is the Complementary Rapid Education Programme (CREP) in Sierra Leone. Obanya (2002:52) rightly observed that the African region entered the twenty-first century with a huge human development deficit; internal conflicts, wars, large-scale displacement of populations, political instability, rapid population growth, etc. Africa's wars are as heterogeneous as its many nations and communities. (Adetula 2006) In majority of these wars, children and youth are the worst hit and are at risk. According to McDonald & Garrow (2000 p.29), being captured by a rebel army is not the only danger that children and youth caught up in war can face. Between 1985 and 1995, 2million children were killed, 5million were disabled or suffered brain damage and 12million lost their homes as a result of war in their countries and were even conscripted into the armed forces. As war disables a country, deprivation and disease increase and education ceases.

Sierra Leone for example, emerged from a decade of war in early 2000, with the help of a large United Nations Peace Keeping Mission. By the end of the war however, more than two thirds of the children in Sierra Leone have been gravely

affected, for many have become orphans or bore the physical mark of the war. The war also caused huge damage to the education infrastructure and the majority of children dropped out of school during the war. (UNESCO 2005) The consequences of this damage and deterioration are reflected in a UNDP Human Development Report of 2000,which shows that only three out of every ten Sierra Leonean could read and write and, school enrollment which was about 55% of children in the school age in 1990, declined to about 42% in 1999. The Complementary Rapid Education Programme (CREP) was one of the strategies used by Sierra Leone's Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MEST), UNICEF, and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) between 2000/2001 and 2004/2005 academic sessions as a collaborative effort to cater for the needs of over-age children and youth who had lost considerable schooling time or have never been to school as a result of the ten year rebel war, and were at risk of becoming irrelevant in the reconstruction process of their society.('Education Action in Sierra Leone' in UNESCO 2000)

In the year 2000 after the civil war, there were about 500,000 children out of school and 25,000 of them were children within the ages of 10-18. CREP was launched in November 2000 with the objective of enabling 25,000 (10-18 year old) children commence or recommence schooling and ensuring a gender gap of less than 30%. In recognition of the fact that most of the children enrolled in the CREP schools were more likely to be psychologically traumatized and therefore ill prepared for immediate formal schooling. Immediately after the war, MEST, UNICEF, and NRC, had started implementing the Rapid Response Education Programme (RREP) a six month long re-orientation programme designed to facilitate re-entry of children in displaced camps into the formal primary school. The programme introduced a harmonized curriculum which incorporated psychosocial and health issues, including information on trauma healing, peace education, human rights, gender and HIV/AIDS, which was also included in the CREP curriculum. Beyond the permanent literacy and numeracy of these over-age children, CREP also aimed at preparing them for secondary education so that they would successfully sit and pass the primary school leaving examinations. CREP was intensive because it compressed the regular six year primary school programme into three years probably to cater for many of these children and, these levels correspond to the normal primary classes as shown in the table below.

Table 2: CREP Structure

Normal Primary School Programme	Classes 1&2	Classes 3&4	Classes 5&6
CREP	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3

Source: Johnson 2006

The CREP programme was boosted further as NRC held monthly workshops for its teachers and they prepare teaching aids, lesson notes and teachers received teaching materials they would need for the term. Also, components of non-formal education such as flexible timetable, non use of uniforms, a relatively low teacher-pupil ratio and the use of shelters to reach the disadvantaged helped to ensure the success of the programme. The attendance at the CREP centres was quite encouraging as 65% of

the pupils were regular and teachers were punctual in schools. Sensitization and mobilization of communities to support CREP was also an important part of the programme. (Johnson 2006)

According to the MEST Report quoted by Johnson (2006), the population of CREP from its inception to its imminent closure in July 2005 soon exceeded its projection. The population in the various centers at the three levels exceeded 50,000 children. This is an indication that the programme was a welcome development and should also be encouraged in other nations in Africa settling down after years of war that has affected children and youth's education in such nations.

Table 3 Enrolment in CREP

District	2000/2001		2001/2002		2002/2003		2003/2004		2004/2005		**TOTAL**
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Port Loko I	1047	753	1846	1424	1811	972	NA	NA	1267	565	**9685**
Port Loko II	NS	NS	973	727	1737	1396	NA	NA	969	609	**6411**
Bombali	NS	NS	NA	NA	956	937	1286	11412	734	643	**15968**
Koinadugu	NS	NS	NA	NA	968	799	718	566	590	520	**4161**
Kambia	NS	NS	NA	NA	3363	2612	3253	2213	3357	1960	**16758**
Kenema	NS	NS	973	727	NA	NA	1355	1177	1027	831	**6090**
Kailahun	NS	NS	1388	744	2962	1735	2640	1476	2694	1772	**15411**
Kono	NS	NS	NS	NS	1177	1173	2058	1523	1540	1254	**8725**
TOTAL	**1047**	**753**	**5180**	**3622**	**12974**	**9624**	**11310**	**18367**	**12178**	**8154**	**83209**

Source: Johnson (2006) NS – Not Started NA – Not Available

Contributions of the CREP towards Reaching Children and Youth at Risk

CREP in Sierra-Leone came to an end in the year 2005 when UNICEF and NRC withdrew their support but left lessons to be learnt by all nations that have been devastated by war leaving children and youth at risk.

Though there can not be perfect human programme, the focus of this paper is not to critically evaluate the CREP, but to look at what it has contributed to reaching children and youth at risk. CREP successfully integrated over-aged children including ex-child combatant into formal education. The fact that some of these children and youth can handle war equipment would have made them to become nuisance in the community and probably spark up another violent riot, because an idle hand is the devil's workshop.

The programme also helped reduction of illiteracy in communities and increased the number of children in schools which would help smooth future reconstruction of their society. In Somalia, for instance, "three generations have lost the opportunity to receive primary education, leaving the rebuilding of the country after war in the hand of illiterate population unable to keep pace with the demands the twenty-first century will

no doubt bring".(McDonald & Garrow 2000:30) If such programme as CREP had been introduced the story could have been different.

Perhaps the sensitization on issues not in normal school curriculum, trauma healing, sexual abuse and children right was a plus to the programme. This, no doubt, must have geared up the children and encouraged them to defend their right instead of being easily lured into violence. Children who would have normally been on the streets are now engaged in the productive activities both at schools and in their homes.

Furthermore, it could be observed that the teacher-pupil ratio in CREP was significantly lower as compared with normal schools, the teaching was effective and so the children grabbed what they were taught easily and were eager to be part of the reconstruction process instead of being part of destruction.

The CREP programme proved to be better administered than the normal schools as NRC held monthly workshops for its teachers and they prepared teaching aids, lesson notes and teachers received teaching materials they would need for the term

Conclusion

Many factors have been identified in this work as putting children and youth at risk in the world today most especially in Africa where majority of them are living below poverty level. Such factors as neurological, environmental and sociological have led to the increase of the level at which children and youth are being exposed to risk. UNO declaration on human rights as well as the goals and targets of the World Conference on Education For All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, have all reaffirmed the need to cater for the children and youth at risk, particularly those who are physically challenged to have access to basic education.

The incessant wars and violent clashes in various nations of Africa had led to millions of young people being exposed to risk. Their lives have been shattered and put at risk by seeing their parents and loved ones mutilated or violently killed and many were even conscripted into the army and left to raise themselves with no education. The Rochas Foundation, Child Care Trust and Complementary Rapid Education Programme have, however, come to the rescue of some African children and youth through their various facilities and activities.

Recommendations

Children and youth at risk in Africa need more than just to be reached once in a long while, they need to be raised and nurtured by individuals, organizations and government at various levels. The hope of the African children and youth at risk is also hinged on sound leadership and sound governance. Therefore, African governments should make fund available for programmes such as the Complementary Rapid Education Programme that was executed in Sierra Leone to provide basic education for average children, drop outs, orphans, teenage mothers and other groups of children that lack adequate care due to poverty.

These humanitarian gestures by RF and CCT should be applauded as a sort of encouragement to similar organizations, individuals, and missionaries (Christian and Muslim) to involve in ameliorating the suffering of children and youth in Africa. Instead of stacking their bank accounts with money they won't spend for profitable things, the political class should show a little kindness to the poor in the society especially those that are at risk.

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