Learning Experiences With Regard to Further Education for Police and Judiciary Concerning Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Minors

Organisations that have distributed the supplement report that they are now more aware of the complexity of commercial sexual exploitation of children. In addition, the supplement has helped women community leaders to learn about this matter and to work with government institutions at local level. The booklet is also being consulted by girls and boys in secondary school.

The production of high-profile media requires a timely definition of the target group for the materials and an according design of the materials with view to content and language.

In designing awareness-raising materials the following criteria should be applied as a basic principle:

• Interest is sparked; however, beware of stigmatizing anew.
• Information and analysis concerning the commercial sexual exploitation of minors are presented in order to counteract myths and taboos.
• Understanding and awareness for the causes and contexts of commercial sexual exploitation of minors are promoted.
• Options for action are developed, and the target groups are being motivated to personal engagement.

Interacting with the taboo of commercial sexual exploitation of minors also required a renewed sensitization for an editorial team that was already quite aware of gender issues.

When working with the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of minors with its different facets it is extraordinarily important to differentiate whether it is children up to 12 years of age or affected adolescents that are placed in the focus of the message. For the editorial staff of the Boletina it was essential not to disseminate any stigmatizing content - neither with regard to the persons concerned nor with regard to their mothers who in Nicaragua are often blamed for their “wayward” daughters. For rights-based information it is necessary to openly name the demand side for commercial sexual exploitation of minors and define perpetrators as such.

In countries with a pronounced tolerance towards the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents like Nicaragua, broadly based sensitization campaigns targeting the basic attitude of society are important precursors for an actual protection of persons concerned.

Extent and Shape

In Central America, the number of persons affected by commercial sexual exploitation of minors is constantly rising, at the national as much as at the regional level. In Nicaragua any forms of sexual exploitation of minors can be found: prostitution of minors – predominantly girls – on streets and markets, in bars and hotels, in tourist centres and in form of pornographic exposure in the Internet. Furthermore, Nicaragua is regarded as country of origin with regard to trafficking in human beings towards Guatemala and Costa Rica for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

The extent of human rights violation in Nicaragua can only be estimated according to information of the network for children’s rights CODENI about 20,000 children and adolescents are being exploited sexually. Most of the girls and boys concerned are between 13 and 18 years old; 90 % of the perpetrators are male and mostly of national origin. The escalating development of tourist centres and an increasing number of international and regional tourists also cause a rising demand for commercial sex in centres like Granada, Rivas, Masaya, Corinto, Esteli and Managua. Especially in the business of trafficking with minors, close contacts to networks of the organized drug trade using the well-known route from Nicaragua via Guatemala and Mexico into the USA are already in existence.

Causes and Background

Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries of Latin America; growing poverty and corrupt political structures contribute to an increased lack of prospects in particular in the lower social classes. Family life is frequently characterized by sexual and physical violence; its prevalence in Nicaragua belongs to the highest in Latin America. According to publications of the World Bank, up to 54 % of children and adolescents are being physically, mentally and sexually mistreated in their families. Sexual abuse of girls through family members as well as discrimination of women and girls illustrates the pronounced “Machismo”, which stresses male power and gratification of interests and relegates women and girls to mere sexual objects. This also explains why the Nicaraguan society tolerates the exploitation of minors instead of condemning the perpetrators. In lieu thereof the young girls and also boys are often stigmatized.
National Activities Combating the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Minors

National Action Plan
Since 2001 Nicaragua has a National Action Plan against commercial sexual exploitation of minors that was compiled jointly by state institutions and civil society groups. Unfortunately there are no sufficient resources for implementing this Action Plan, so that the updated Plan of 2003 to 2008 can be implemented in a very limited way only. Children’s rights organizations and multilateral donors like UNICEF and ILO/IPEC mainly support the few activities directly referring to sexual exploitation of minors.

In 2003 Nicaragua ratified the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Pornography and Child Prostitution; the following years saw the signing of the Palermo Protocol as well as the Inter-American Convention Against Trafficking in Children. The new Penal Code of Nicaragua entered into force in July 2008. It includes the elements of the crime of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents such as pornography, sexual relations in exchange for presents or payment, sexual exploitation in tourism and trafficking for sexual exploitation. In 2008 the Ministry for Family, Adolescence and Childhood in coordination with UNICEF is drawing a Strategy to combat abuse, sexual exploitation and trafficking in minors in Nicaragua. The Ministry has set up the hotline number 155 for reporting cases.

The insufficient legal prosecution of sexual offences and the inefficient closure of lawsuits discourage the persons concerned from reporting an offence to the police.

Promotion of Training and Further Education of Skilled Personnel in Nicaragua

Our Partners
The Convention Project supports the foundation “Puntos de Encuentro” in the framework of their gender-sensitive public relation and awareness-raising work. Puntos de Encuentro aims at advancing gender justice and the rights of adolescents in their daily life. They pursue the vision of creating a space where women and men, adolescents and adults can live together free of violence and with sensitivity towards gender issues. In order to spread these values they use public media like radio, television and journals in particular, but also seminars and trainings for improving personal and institutional communication.

In November 2007 the supplement titled “When They Steal Your Life - The Sale of Sex with Adolescents. Girls and Boys” was published with support of the Convention Project. It mainly addresses young women and mothers and is supposed to provide a basis for analyzing the complex set of problems of commercial sexual exploitation of minors in Nicaragua as well as for counteracting taboos and stigmatization. The following subject areas are covered:

- What do we understand by commercial sexual exploitation of minors?
- Real-life examples of commercial sexual exploitation of minors in Nicaragua
- The “promises” perpetrators give to adolescents
- Characteristics of male and female perpetrators
- The male-dominated, authoritarian society
- Seeing, listening and holding one's tongue: The tolerance of the society
- Vulnerability and social exclusion of children and adolescents
- Casualties on the outer and the inner - consequences of sexual commercial exploitation of minors
- How can we protect girls and boys? The roles of state institutions, communities, families and individuals
- The legal situation in Nicaragua and contact points for advice and information

In order to produce this supplement the editors alongside numerous colleagues from the Foundation went through an intense learning process that was composed of the following steps:

- Making contact with 15 children’s rights organizations and visiting places and persons affected by commercial sexual exploitation of minors in Nicaragua.
- Analyzing documents about the commercial sexual exploitation of minors in Nicaragua.
- Conducting an internal concept workshop with external specialist counselling in Puntos de Encuentro in order to analyze the set of problems around the commercial sexual exploitation of minors in Nicaragua and to develop future core messages for the Foundation.
- Integrating the topic of commercial sexual exploitation of minors in Nicaragua into the strategic planning of the Foundation: In future they treat commercial sexual exploitation of minors in Nicaragua as a consistent topic.
- The editors creating the first draft of the supplement, with constant advice from the experts.
- Linguistic editing with view to the target group and reflecting on the content messages that the supplement strives to convey.
- Selecting photos, laying out of the material and proofreading of the galleys by the group of advisors and adolescents.
- Interviews with focus groups help evaluating the supplement with reference to readability and relevance for the target group.
- An unexpected but pleasant result of this process is the institutionalization of the topic due to the intense discussion inside the Foundation. The commercial sexual exploitation is now being incorporated into the priority topics for radio, television and further education work.
- The new TV series of the Foundation, to be screened in Nicaragua from 2010 onwards and later on also in Central American and Mexico, treats the commercial sexual exploitation of minors in Nicaragua as a consistent topic.