

XXII TecMUN Jr.

**United Nations Children's
Fund**



Delegate:

In the following paper I will describe two different situations that affect millions of children around the globe. I wrote facts and figures, analyzed different news, texts and reports which were alarming enough to disappoint me, make me cry and even mistrust humankind. But I will confess that there were only three words that made me realize what the problem actually was: “a lost generation”. You might think I refer to the children that cannot go to school due to the Ebola outbreak or the girls that will die right after giving birth, but those topics won’t be reviewed right now. I want to talk about you and me as part of that lost generation.

We think that what happens to others does not affect us and the consequences of our actions can barely be appreciated by others. There is nothing that gathers us together, no element that could possibly characterize youth nowadays. Yet, we are not independent dots that cannot even join a line, we are an amorphous and chaotic mass. You go right, and I go left, but *we* go nowhere. As there is no direction, neither is there a sense of belonging, of unity. I cannot find myself in you: we are lost.

I invite you to hold my hand and walk with me. Let us pretend for three days we are more than just an amorphous and chaotic mass, pretend we do have a direction, solve problems together; let us pretend we can be one.

When the model ends, I will still want you to walk with me, but this time, I won’t expect you to pretend. I will expect *us to be*, more than a lost generation.

Sincerely yours,

Lorena Martínez Tejeda

President of the United Nations Children’s Fund.

Topic A: Protection of children in West Africa affected by the Ebola outbreak and consequent social impact.

Outline

The recent prevalence of Ebola in African territories has led to both health and social matters that risk children's integrity. Measures for the eradication of the virus have not reached all the affected communities, leading to an increasingly disproportionate number of infected children. Furthermore, the issues that have resulted from the Ebola outbreak go beyond contagion: caregivers concerned by a potential infection are not available for orphans. Besides, the young population of Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone are being affected by the disruption of schooling.

2014 Ebola outbreak has become the most devastating health emergency since the virus was first discovered in 1976. Its effects include an estimated number of 2,400 deaths and 4,784 reported cases as of September the 12th. Due to the impossibility to confirm infection with laboratory tests, these figures might be even larger.

5 West African countries have been affected by the virus, which causes a 52% fatality rate. Until it is contained an approximate figure of 20,000 Ebola cases is expected.

According to the World Health Organization:

“The Ebola virus spreads through human-to-human transmission via direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected people, and with surfaces and materials (e.g. bedding, clothing) contaminated with these fluids”. (WHO, 6)

People that face the highest risk to acquire Ebola are those who have direct contact with infected victims, such as health-care workers and even mourners that are close to corpses during burial ceremonies.

The mortality rates mentioned above have repercussions in African children in many ways, starting from the growing risk to acquire the virus and even preventable diseases. Health services have devoted all its efforts to control Ebola but are not totally functional regarding common childhood illnesses. Therefore, a lack of vaccines have led to numerous deaths among children under 5 years old, that could have been prevented, such as malaria, pneumonia and diarrhea. At least 2,000 orphans in Liberia, face rejection from caregivers, and members of their communities.

They are neglected as there is a possibility they have acquired the virus, and no one is willing to help a potentially infected child, leaving them roaming the street without protection, health care or nutrition. The disruption of schooling has also become an important issue among the young population, as well as uneducated nations face a bigger challenge to give instruction to their population about the steps to prevent contagion.

The prevalence of Ebola is expected to last in the current conditions, at least 12 more months, and by now, only measures to stop the spread of Ebola have been taken by the government of affected nations, such as mandatory lockdowns, that aim to isolate new cases. The decision to close schools is temporary and there is no scheduled date for a back to school. As the virus cannot be contained, and the fear of the extension of Ebola in 15 additional countries remains, the disruption of education in Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone might continue for one more year.

With the purpose to provide education even in the middle of a crisis, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), supports emergency education systems that may be temporary classrooms, distribution of notebooks, and essential school supplies. Also, self-directed learning is promoted for children that cannot leave their homes. Still, these measures represent only the 2% of the whole fund for humanitarian assistance.

Despite the international efforts to control the outbreak, some communities have been left unprotected, as only high populated regions are helped. In Liberia, the most affected country, no more beds are available to treat patients. Even though UNICEF has sent numerous supplies from Denmark, by September the 16th, over \$200 million were still needed to fight Ebola, as over 8.5 million children live in the territories affected by the outbreak.

The Obama administration has announced to provide treatment facilities in cooperation with local officials, as well as the development of Ebola treatments.

Moreover, Malaysia is willing to donate 20 million of protective rubber gloves, fighting the health workers strike that resulted from the poor hygienic conditions in which they worked.

French and German military forces have planned to provide airlifts to Ebola affected countries, in order to transport medical supplies.

Countries such as Russia, United Kingdom, Canada and Japan are currently developing vaccines, yet no official cure has been approved.

International efforts are key in the fight against Ebola. However, these measures were not taken since the very first announcement of the outbreak in early March, leading the current exponentially-growing effects of Ebola.

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Topic B: Solutions to the elimination of physical violence against married adolescent girls in developing countries.

Outline

The current situation regarding physical, sexual and psychological violence against children, as well as worldwide attitudes towards it, is reflected in alarming United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) data compilations that show the proportion of married adolescent girls that are not only mistreated, but also consider justifiable to be subject of abuse. The incidence of this behavior increases in developing countries where the prevalence of partner violence has an accepted cultural background and the general marriage age is within the teenage years.

The largest inform about violence against children, ever reported by UNICEF: "Hidden in plain sight" reveals data from 190 countries, and provides specific information regarding various forms of violence, its causes and intra-generational consequences. Aggression against young victims, causes in them not only trauma, but also low self-esteem, health issues, depression, substance abuse and suicide. The specific case of married girls between 15 and 19 years old concerns the international organization, as it represents notorious gender gaps in school attendance, high mortality rates due to maternity, and exacerbates the prevalence of domestic violence in developing countries.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right to "free and full consent to a marriage", which is violated when "one of the parties involved is not sufficiently mature to make an informed decision about a life partner". Harmful traditional practices go against this and the right to "protection from all forms of abuse". Nevertheless, governments take poor legal measures, if any, to attack this problematic.

Within developing countries society accepts this practice as part of their culture, and defend it in the name of family honour. Therefore, girls do not report to an authority they have been victims of domestic violence as they consider correct or justifiable to have suffered sexual, physical and psychological aggression. In fact, early marriage is thought to have protective effects against rape, and be a way to ensure girls won't get pregnant out of wedlock, which would dishonour their families.

Despite they have an expected future as victims of wife battering, teenagers are forced to marry old man because they can provide them economic resources. It is already a tradition, practiced in poor families to reduce home expenses, such as clothing, food and education (in case it is available for girls). When women do not have access to school, it is even more likely that parents will marry off their daughters at an early age. Reduction of debts and solution to family feuds are also economic causes of child marriage. Bride prices are inversely related with the youth of the girl, as she may dispose of more time to rise her children, even when she is not mature enough to do so.

As the age gap between the old man and the young women increases, the risk of partner violence grows. Those who refuse or resist marriage are also mistreated, including girls and their mothers. This practice persists in patriarchal societies where fathers and elders have the last word on the selection of spouses for their children.

The highest prevalence rates focus on South Asia and Africa, where the 40% of girls are married before 18. However according to the Council on Foreign Relations, “in terms of absolute numbers, the 40 percent of all child marriages take place in India”. Followed by Bangladesh, Nigeria, Brazil, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mexico and Niger.

Reducing the practice of early age marriages has become a priority in the global agenda, as health complications of early age childbirth and pregnancy are the main causes of death among young women and 30 percent of the total maternal deaths. Child or adolescent mothers tend to give birth to babies that are more likely to die, have lower birth weights, weak immune systems, degenerative diseases and a higher risk of malnutrition than those born to older woman.

In order to avoid pregnancy, women who got married before the age of 18 and come from poor families or rural areas, tend to use traditional or folkloric contraception. Efforts are required to improve their access to effective and modern contraceptive methods. Child marriage also increases girls' risk of HIV infection, as they are often involved in polygynous relationships. Furthermore, girls forced into adulthood before they are physically, emotionally and intellectually mature suffer various harmful long-life effects that persist as they receive little or no support on their attempts to leave their abusive unions. Another consequence resulting from this practice, are poor school enrollment figures. Uneducated married girls are not income earning prospects, which exacerbates poverty in their communities. Formal education can also be taken as a preventive measure. It has been proved that women that attend school, reduce their chance to be married during adolescence. Legislative measures to make education beyond the primary level free and compulsory are required.

UNICEF recognizes the importance of mapping early marriage levels within countries, as it helps to identify where are prevention campaigns more needed and “track future progress”. International cooperation along with the government of developing countries, is required to strengthen girls' rights protective policies and define a minimum age for marriage, as about 142 million girls worldwide will marry before age 18 this decade according to the United Nations Population Fund

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