



Associazione

Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII

Associazione Internazionale di fedeli di diritto pontificio – www.apg23.org

- written contribution -

Day of General Discussion 'The right of the child to education in emergency situations'

19 September 2008, Geneva

1. THE COMMUNITY OF POPE JOHN XXIII – COMUNITA' PAPA GIOVANNI XXIII

The 'Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII' (Community of Pope John XXIII) is an International Association of the Faithful of Pontifical Right, recognised by the Italian Government with DPR no. 596 of 05/07/1972.

The members of the Association are committed to sharing their life directly with the poor and the least and, as a result of this, to trying to remove the causes of injustice, social exclusion, neglect of human rights and conflicts of various kinds.

The Association is based in Italy and is also present in: Albania, Australia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Croatia, Kenya, India, Israel, Moldova, Palestine, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, territory of Kosovo, Venezuela and Zambia.

It carries out a wide range of projects and has centres of various kinds which work in favour of: children, adolescents and adults in difficulty; unborn babies; orphans; children and adults with disabilities; substance abusers; alcoholics; homeless people; the elderly; prisoners; nomads; people affected by HIV/AIDS; women enslaved for the purpose of sexual exploitation; immigrants; refugees and victims of war.

In 2006 the Association was granted Special Consultative Status as NGO by ECOSOC.

2. THE METHOD OF 'SHARING'

Sharing life directly with the poor, marginalised and oppressed is the guideline for all interventions of the Community of Pope John XXIII. The most profound needs of children, and of every person, are knowing that someone cares about them and their life, and of being loved in a unique, personal, individual and continuous way.

In particular, children who have been deprived have a deep need to feel that they have been chosen by somebody. Children need to be loved, to build up strong interpersonal relationships and to develop their self-esteem in order to grow up in an healthy and harmonious way. All this is possible only through the meeting of life with life, that is, through people who commit themselves to the child and take care of him/her. Therefore, children need to have a meaningful educational relationship with a meaningful .you. Sharing life answers these deep needs. Sharing life goes beyond the concept of service. Service implies a user-supplier relationship between the receiver and the giver of help. It contributes to the relief of suffering but it does not change the structure of human relationships. Sharing life, however, eradicates the barriers, castes and separations created by human beings, which are the root causes of oppression. The distinction between the receiver and giver disappears: everybody shares his/her own abilities and difficulties, building a community which deeply renews relationships among people. Sharing life goes beyond assistance: instead of giving bread to the hungry, they are invited to sit at the table with us; instead of placing children in institutions, they are welcomed into our families.

Therefore, the Community of Pope John XXIII does not act for the poor but with the poor, enabling them to have an active role in their liberation.

3. INTRODUCTION: THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Since early childhood, children need meaningful relationships which translate into education, i.e. the ability to develop the spiritual, psychological, relational, social and most profound identity of a person.

The family is undoubtedly a safe basis which provides serenity and balance to growing children, through the love of their parents and other brothers and sisters with whom they grow up, play and quarrel. At the age of three,

children should enter the school system, where they can learn how to read and write and know the basic rules through the relationship with their teachers and schoolfellows.

Although every child should have access to the school system, without being discriminated against, and be given a possibility to mature and grow, in many parts of the world this does not happen. Many children are denied access to education. In addition, education is not always provided with the same quality level.

We must concentrate our efforts in order to enable everybody to have access to primary school and receive incentives to continue to university level and above.

There are a few countries in the world where young people with physical, and in particular mental, disabilities have a possibility to interact with people of the same age group. Separated, sectional and 'special education' systems are still widespread. In Africa, Latin America, Asia and East Europe, there are many commendable, but still marginalising, activities and projects of this kind. There is a widespread attitude of focusing on disabilities rather than bringing out the potential that the child with disabilities is able to give to the school and general community.

Education is a matter of heart and mind. It is about having the ability to bring out of the pupil his/her own abilities and characteristics of personality. School is a great resource and unique opportunity to know, experiment, observe, discuss, learn and develop a critical sense.

Parents are also greatly responsible for all this. They should not delegate but rather actively cooperate with the teaching staff and the other educators who play an irreplaceable role. May the school be a place of commitment and responsibility for the building of a new humanity.

4. PRAXIS FOLLOWED BY THE COMMUNITY OF POPE JOHN XXIII IN IMPLEMENTING THE RIGHT OF THE CHILD TO EDUCATION IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Sharing life with children implies guaranteeing and safeguarding their rights. It also implies helping the child to develop individual awareness, self-determination abilities, positive relationships and solidarity with others. Through experience gained throughout the years, by sharing life with people in need and, in particular, with children in emergency situations, the Association has developed different forms of intervention, in particular the Rainbow Project in Sub-Saharan Africa and the 'Operation Dove – Nonviolent Peace Corp'.

The Association 'Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII', in the various countries and territorial context, has surveyed that the problems connected to the right to education: the widespread trouble to gain access to primary school, the lacking quality of public school system, the deficient training of teachers and in some countries – overall in the sub-saharian Africa – their immoderate turnover, the adoption of threatening educative practice and inclusive of corporal punishment, finally the shortage of suitable and reachable facilities.

Further problem surveyed, sharing the life of the children, is their difficulty to attend adequately the educational curriculum when they are not enough nourished. The Association has answered to the problem combining a nutritional support with the educational activities. This approach has got a good result: children attend much more the school, also because they are fed, and are more diligent in the educative activities.

Guaranteeing children's right to education means laying the necessary foundations for self-development and guaranteeing the chance of a future. Today, millions of children don't have access to primary education. There are also many different reasons why children drop out of school: family poverty which often forces children to work, children who are orphaned and deprived of any kind of support (think, for example, of the emergency situation created by HIV/AIDS and war/armed conflict), a precarious life which prevents future planning, the financial burden placed on families by the cost of education etc. Taking into consideration the complexity of these things, it is necessary to develop strategies which are relevant to the various cultural and social contexts.

However, starting from our experience, we believe the following general guidelines to be effective: redeeming families from the burden of the cost of education;

- promoting the insertion of all children into educational systems, paying particular attention to the integration of the weakest and most discriminated against members of society (street kids, children with disabilities, children affected by HIV/AIDS, gypsies, former child soldiers etc). When this is not possible, it is necessary to develop alternative educational paths;
- safeguarding the rights of children, in particular in conflict areas (IDP's, refugees and former child soldiers), through welcoming and educational places and projects which help with the overall balanced development

of children.

4.1 Rainbow Project presentation and good praxis

The Association 'Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII' is present in Sub-Saharan Africa, where it pursues the same objectives of keeping children in their families of origin or extended families, thus helping to avoid their institutionalisation.

This is particularly true in the case of AIDS orphans, a phenomenon of increasing social dimensions.

According to UNAIDS figures, there are about 11 million AIDS orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa¹. Despite being aware of the alarming social dimension of this problem, the Association reaffirms that the institutionalisation of children is an inadequate answer to their needs and rights. According to research carried out by our Association in 1997, the traditional, African extended family represents a feasible answer to the emergency of orphans, if properly supported.

The Rainbow Project, established in 1997, has the following aims:

- To reach and help a large number of children
- To keep them in related and non-related family by supporting these families psychologically and materially
- To make the nation aware of the humanitarian emergency

Families are supported in a variety of ways which include: helping and listening centres; awareness and support groups; educational support; nutrition centres and emergency shelters. The project is carried out in cooperation with local social services and public bodies and institutions. It is a member of LARC, a network of associations and NGOs for the safeguarding and promotion of children's rights in the Copperbelt region of Zambia.

Rainbow is a multi-sectorial project, designed to be implemented in all areas of the country and in different countries. It is not a new project to be added to the existing ones, it is rather a model which can be used to co-ordinate and link the organisations which are already operating in this field. In the year 2007, in Zambia, Tanzania and Kenya, Rainbow project helped with the reinsertion of 18,134 children into their extended families, supported 7.367 families in difficulty through e.g. the microcredit and nutritional support schemes and provided shelter and a family environment to 386 minors living on the streets.

To face the pandemic is necessary to mobilize the civic society in finding the answers to the different needs of the OVC. Local people know the needs and are able to find the proper solutions according to the traditional environment. Rainbow networking system is linking organisations, local authorities and the families caring for Orphans and vulnerable children.

Direct school assistance

The provision of assistance to pay for the school requirements to guardians of OVC² has been an intervention, which was already in place at the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. With the decline in the economy in the early eighties and the introduction of cost sharing since 1992, many parents and guardians faced increasingly problems to sent the children to school. At first, it was in particular the secondary school pupils, but later on also the primary school children whose education became too expensive for their carers.

One can distinguish several groups among the children who need this kind of assistance. The main groups are:

1. Children attending school, but whose parents are sick or have died and whose new guardian cannot afford the costs
2. Children who attend a community school because the guardian cannot afford a formal primary school and who should move on to a formal primary school
3. Children who completed primary school and are enrolled in a secondary school, where the costs are much higher and unaffordable by the parents/guardians
4. Children who completed secondary school and who have obtained a place in an institute of higher learning and whose parents/guardians cannot afford this.

Somebody once said that if you sponsor a child to go grade one at the primary school, you basically sign a contract to help the child through university when it would have the ability to do so. This is something sponsors

¹ AIDS Epidemic Update, Unaid 2007, UNAIDS/07.27E / JC1322E

² Orphans and Vulnerable Children

of children to attend school easily forget. The costs for primary school are not high, secondary school is already much more and a college or university is rather expensive. Sponsoring children to attend school is a long-term commitment and becomes increasingly expensive over the years.

The ongoing HIV/AIDS epidemic increases the number of OVC and therefore the number of requests for assistance. To honour even the most urgent cases, the costs is increasing annually.

Community schools.

A consequence of the ongoing HIV/AIDS epidemic is the growing number of children who have lost one or both partners, or who are vulnerable because of continuous illness of one or both parents.

Orphans as such have been part of the African society, as in any other society. However, orphans were not considered as orphans in African (sub-Saharan) communities, for example: 'A child of my brother (or sister, depending on the tribe) is also my child' used to be the reality in the country. This family care system (extended family) came under severe pressure in the mid nineties. The capacity of the brothers and sisters of deceased AIDS victims to provide accommodation and care and support became less and less and 'the orphan problem' emerged. A growing number of children ended up with grandparents, who without the support of their own children had to look after many small children suddenly.

The community schools are part of the educational support activity not in competition with the public educational system. Community schools are the second option, i.e. first of all the organisations should try to enrol the children into formal schools. Only when such a possibility is not available, or when the capacity to enrol more children isn't feasible, the community school option could be a possible and feasible answer to the emergency situation. In this sense the action of Rainbow Project is directed to guarantee the right to education in emergency situations created by the AIDS/HIV pursuing both the solutions: supporting the families efforts, creating / building / maintaining of community school and school canteens.

In Formal school Rainbow provides for uniforms, school fees and school requirements. In community schools Rainbow provides for:

- School requirements
- school furniture
- teachers training
- school buildings

The purpose of many community schools is to provide education for the first three or four years of primary school and that the children will move on to the formal education sector. On this regard rainbow provides also for examination fees, in order to help the children to be re-enrolled in formal school where possible.

Education is an important component of the support for OVC. Without education, your chances in society are marginal, but apart from writing and reading the school are also supposed to prepare a child in other ways for the future. Education is often seen as one of the most important components in the care for OVC.

Rainbow Project has supported 27 community schools, enabled 4,150 children to go to school and fed 6,676 children in school canteens.

4.2 'Operation Dove – Nonviolent Peace Corp' and good praxis

Operazione Colomba, started in 1992 during the war in Yugoslavia. We tried to live in a nonviolent way in the midst of war areas and share our life with all those who were forced to undergo violence as a result of conflict and war. We lived in both sides of the front helping families to keep in touch and protecting ethnic minorities by getting in the way. We made dialogue possible between the fighting parts and amongst different churches. We helped to recreate an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence and reconciliation. Since 1995 we have 'exported' this way of 'entering into wars' into other countries. In some conflict areas the 'Operation Dove' volunteers promoted unarmed escorts to protect the access of children to school, particularly the volunteers have monitored the access to school for Palestinian children of Twnai village, denouncing the situation of violence by settlers and obtaining a escort of Israeli army. The aim is to guarantee the access to school and education in conflict situations.

KOSSOVO (2003 – 2008)

At the beginning Operazione Colomba worked in Kosovo from 1998 to 2001. It then returned in December 2003 with a project carried out within 'Tavolo Trentino con il Kosovo', a net of Italian organisations, and founded by the Autonomous Province of Trento. Since then the volunteers of Operazione Colomba have been living in the Serbian enclave of Gorazdevac, a little village near the city of Peja-Pec (North-Eastern Kosovo), which is of Albanian majority. The objective is to actively work both with the village and the town and to build bridges between the two realities.

Over the last year the activities were mainly focused on three key-points:

- a) the sharing of daily life;
- b) civil escort and protection of people;
- c) a path of reconciliation and re-elaboration of the conflict with a group of young Albanians and a group of young Serbs as well as members of other minorities such as Bosnians and Egyptians.

Over the years our volunteers have been eager to work with a group of young Serbian people from the village and one Albanian from the town. Thus a path of reconciliation and transformation of conflict was launched. First the two groups met separately, but then they started meeting together.

This path is made of four key-points.

- Analysis of the Kosovo conflict. The two groups elaborated separately their respective perspectives of the conflict and then presented their analysis to the other group;
- Exchange visit to Prjedor (BIH) with the two groups. In Prjedor there is a significant number of re-entered refugees and internally displaced people;
- Sharing of their personal experiences: once a week the two groups meet. Each time two members share their story during the conflict up to now. The audience is supposed to hang and to be deeply respectful;
- Visiting of different realities in Kosovo (throughout the year) and meeting with members of the Parent's Circle Bereaved Families. It is an Israeli-Palestinian Organization of people who lost family members in the Middle Eastern conflict and decided to turn their pain into a positive energy to work for reconciliation and peace in their country.

NORTHERN UGANDA (2004-2008)

Operazione Colomba has been several times in North Uganda starting from November 2004. Its volunteers were in the refugees camps in the district of Gulu.

They are trying to intervene in some areas:

- Intervention in the Minakulu area where the outcast, such as disabled and old people, are particularly taken care of. In order to do this, the volunteers have been introduced in the villages and in the families by the paralegals. The aim is to offer some support to those who, because of the war, cannot get access of some basic, essential services (schools, hospitals, food, hut building, etc.), which are brought where they are needed, by working with these people in the fields and creating relationships between the population and the services offered by the NGO's.

- Recreation / educative activities with the children who live in the refugee camp.

An interesting and positive project, whom we are cooperating with, is located in Gulu (Northern Uganda): the Sacred Heart School, that, after a first phase dedicated to welcome the girl former child-soldiers, schedules a tutorial programme of reintegration into school system and the opportunity of professional learning through professional courses.

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ANNEX

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE

1. Considering that there are many people and institutional bodies involved in the safeguarding of children rights to education (e.g. Public school, private school, Aid specialized agencies, humanitarian NGO's, social services, juvenile courts, foster families, associations and others), we recommend to establish, following the principle of 'horizontal subsidiarity' and in the child's best interests, a synergic procedure which aims to give value to and harmonise the specific tasks of each.
2. With reference to the commitment of the States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to 'promote and encourage international cooperation', we recommend the implementation of the commitment of rich countries to dedicate 0.7% of their GDP to the fight against poverty, in particular to favouring the access of children to food, education and healthcare.
3. We recommend the Committee to take decisive action, in strict collaboration with the different bodies of the United Nations and NGO's, for the prevention of different forms of violence connected with armed conflict and the destruction of educational structure. We also recommend the Committee to ensure that, when an embargo is enforced, the same does not violate the rights of the children in general and especially the right to education. We would also like to emphasise the importance of the education to nonviolence, to living together of different people, and to human rights during or after conflicts. This is a positive opportunity offered to children who are involved in wars and can contribute to their human formation and prevention of further violence.
4. We invite the Committee to carefully monitor and analyse the exclusion and discrimination condition/practice coming from HIV / AIDS stigma and structural condition of poverty, and also the exclusion practice and shape coming from unbearable barrier to school admission (school fees and contributory burden), spreading the urgency to diffuse good praxis both in the civil society activities, and in the national programme implemented by governments. We recommend the Committee that this kind of monitoring and analysis and the consequent proposals will be elaborated considering actual case and operative programmes, not aim's declaration, that are common and shared heritage at theoretical level, but too often remain dead letter or promotional efforts.
5. With reference to the right to education, in situations of emergency due to an ongoing conflict, after a conflict or during military occupation, we underline the importance to re-start schools in the villages of origin of those who have been evacuated and are gradually going back to their places of origin. It is important to encourage social reconstruction and school attendance in refugee camps and for IDPs. With regard to the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldier into society, it is important to implement educational projects that also help avoid their stigmatization. With reference to this, we believe that it is important to implement long-term projects which involve these children and adolescents at different levels. We suggest that the Committee promotes research to monitor and verify the effective reinsertion of former child-soldiers and the good educational praxis implemented.