

Initiative for the Development of Former Child Soldiers (IDEFOCS)

Organization's Information

Initiative for the Development of Former Child Soldiers (IDEFOCS)
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Description of specific project, practice or technique:

We address former child soldiers (FCS) rehabilitation and reintegration specifically in Liberia through the implementation of the survey, detraumatization, rehabilitation and reintegration (SDRR) program. The SDRR was designed by IDEFOCS to buttress United Nations (UN) and government's efforts in rehabilitating and reintegrating FCS where the DDR remains a failure. The SDRR identifies three categories of FCS. Those who went through the DDR but didn't complete it; those who completed it but didn't receive post reintegration support, and those who didn't go through the process at all. Through a survey we identify these FCS and develop them based on their respective rehabilitation and reintegration stage. An intense trauma counseling is recommended for those who suffered severe Post Traumatic Stress disorder (PTSD); the capacity of others is built as they receive empowerment training, and through an established network of donors, sponsors, and stakeholders they receive post reintegration support such as job. We are convinced that addressing these needs will provide long lasting peace, development, solidarity and the prevention of crime and the re-occurrence of arm conflict (WAR) in our society.

Information on Organization or agency including history and scope of work:

IDEFOCS is a non-profit grass-root civil society organization founded by former child soldiers dedicated to the prevention of the use of children in war; and to the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers in post war Liberia. We provide trauma counseling, agriculture programs, scholarships (vocational/academic) for former child soldiers (FCS) both boys and girls by lobbying and networking with international and other national organizations and stakeholders.

Established in 2003 on the Buduburam's refugee settlement in Ghana under the Refugee Welfare Council, and registered with the Liberian government on July 27, 2008, IDEFOCS had implemented several community-based projects along with other partners.

In 2003, on the Buduburam Refugee Camp, Ghana, IDEFOCS launched its first agriculture project for FCS which brought in several international volunteers from Ashesi University College, Legon University, Ghana and other universities around the world to consider the plights of FCS and help raise funds to help rehabilitate and reintegrate them into the refugee community. About 450 former child soldiers benefited from this Child Soldier Reintegration Fund which saw many of them learn some basic skills and were reintegrated into the Liberian Refugee Society.

In 2005 we were opportuned to join several representatives from around the world on the Tackling Poverty Together (TPT) research in Lusaka and Kampala. The research was sponsored by the UN and the Swedish Youth Council and the findings from the research led to the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals.

In 2007 the organization was represented at the Pan African Youth Leadership Forum in Ghana by its Director, Morris Y. Matadi, where several peace initiatives were discussed and proposed for world action. During that same year we had the opportunity to attend the Koffie Anna International Peace Keeping School, Ghana for the child soldiers peace initiative study organized by the former UN general, Romeo Diline of Canada.

After the 2007 Presidential Election, which Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf won, we decided to move the organization to Liberia as the main job was in Liberia to get the many FCS loitering purposelessly around the country, even after the DDRR program completion, to adopt to the Survey, De-dramatization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (SDRR) program designed in Ghana by IDEFOCS to help buttress the DDRR and government's efforts.

In 2008, Working with Pump Aid in Liberia, we were able to surveyed 12 FCS, those who had gone through the DDRR program but still needed post re-integration support, to learned how to build Elephant well and toilet (a new invention of building well and toilet more economically from Zimbabwe) and they are now gainfully employed by Pump Aid in Liberia and are building wells and toilets around the country as a way of identifying and reintegrating into normal society.

Also, In 2008 we launched a sanitation project implemented in the Paynesville community to unite FCS with their community. Sponsored by an International volunteer called Sara Terry from Boston, USA, the sanitation project attracted many community leaders and human right activists such as Youth Activist Kimmie Weeks. with Mr. weeks organization Youth Action International(YAI) we worked on the Green Light project which saw FCS working along with students from around Monrovia to clean and plant trees around the Tubman Boulevard-Paynesville's route. Subsequently, we entered into a partnership with (YAI) which led to the training for 40 women surveyed to be associated with fighting forces (WAFF), to be trained in several skills from 2008 to 2010.

From 2008-2009 the organization ran its first self-initiative agriculture program in Peter Town, Margibi County. During this period we were successful in harvesting cassava crops. The following year the project was extended and sponsored by Spirit Liberia , working with 35 FCS (18 WAFF and 17 young men) in August 2010 the organization successfully completed another production of peanut crops.

Presently we are still based in the same region of Wornig District, Peter Town, working along with these 35 FCS to organize the first Botanical Re-integration Village project (BRV) that would provide job opportunities for FCS skilled in agriculture, vocational trainings, and a women empowerment center for the young women of the region to promote peace and unity amongst the people of this remote town that once served as a rebel soldier's camp controlled by the late notorious general Nison Gaye that was responsible for the training of several children as fighters.

Describe the context in which the agency works, analyse conflict, and indicate how this analysis has influenced the peacebuilding work of the organization:

The Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration aimed at consolidating national security by reintegrating ex-combatants into society remains questionable as the majority of crimes committed in our country is belief by the police to be perpetrated by ex-combatants, creating a distraught for FCS. With UN and the Government quite convinced that the DDRR program was a complete success its become difficult to convince them that there are thousands of FCS languishing in the ghetto in poverty. And the reluctance to accept many FCS in our society has led to the high increase in violence, drug abuse, and murderous crimes. With the public conception that these people are dangerous and cannot be accepted into society we are

faced with a grave challenge to act positively in addressing this conflict by reintegrating these FCS into society. The SDRR program was designed purposefully for us to work out a genuine solution to the resolution of the conflict between FCS and the community.

Impact of work:

In 2008 our sanitation project implemented in the Paynesville community, sponsored by International volunteer called Sara Terry had a great impact in our advocacy with the community that these FCS could be useful. The Green Light sanitation project with Youth Activist Kimmie Weeks that resulted into a partnership with Youth Action International (YAI) led to the training for 40 women surveyed to be associated with fighting forces (WAFF), to be trained in several skills from 2008 to 2010.

The first self-initiative agriculture program in Peter Town, Margibi County from 2008-2010 saw about 35 FCS (18 WAFF and 17 young men) trained in agriculture skills.

Our partnership with Pump Aid in Liberia, saw us surveyed 12 FCS, who had gone through the DDDR program but still needed post re-integration support, who were to build Elephant well and toilet (a new invention of building well and toilet more economically from Zimbabwe) and they are now gainfully employed by Pump Aid and are building wells and toilets around the country instead of committing crimes.

We believed that these transformed FCS can contribute immensely to our peace process building process.

Story of agency's peace work:

In August 2002 on the Buduburam refugee camp, the Initiative for the Development of Former Child Soldiers (IDEFOCS) was given birth to through the strong protest of several FCS led by Morris Y. Matadi. These FCS came together to protest against the re-recruitment of several ex-combatants and the recruitment of Children by war-lords to fight in Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast. With banners and posters tooting around the camp and streets of Ghana those threatening the peace and safety of these youths found it quite difficult to carry out their dubious activity of recruiting and re-recruiting several vulnerable ex-combatants and children.

The protest finally gained relevance and came to UNHCR's attention and these young men became recognized by that international body to represent all former child soldiers on the refugee camp.

Thus IDEFOCS was founded, and have since live up to its vision and goals to foster peace and stability by addressing the plight of FCS reintegration from Ghana to Liberia; and is presently working on its FCS Botanical Reintegration Village that will serve as an institution in building the capacity of former child soldier. The village will contain a recourse center, dormitories, technical, vocational and academy school, the former child soldiers' memorial peace tower in memory of all children that were misused in armed conflict. The project would cater to several FCS around Liberia and also Africa using its SDRR program.