

# Suriname Country Report

Presented by

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## INTRODUCTION

Suriname lies on the northeastern part of the continent of South America. It borders on the Atlantic Ocean in the North, Guyana in the West, French Guyana in the East and Brazil in the South. Suriname is divided into ten administrative districts. Its capital city is Paramaribo. The country, which is largely covered by tropical rain forest, has a surface area of about 162,820 square kilometers. About 90% of the population lives in the coastal area, while 72% of the population lives in a 30 km radius around the capital Paramaribo. Suriname has a multi-ethnic population which consists of Amerindians (3%) and Maroons (10%), Creoles (35%), Indians (35%), Javanese (16%), Chinese (2%), Lebanese and European descendants (1%). Dutch is the official language and Sranan Tongo is the lingua franca. The literacy rate in 1996 for women was 89.5% and for men 91.6%.

## Brief description of the represented institute .

In Suriname the Ministry of Social Affairs has an important role in monitoring and coordinating social policy and programs for children. In March 1993, Suriname ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this context the Ministry is overseeing and coordinating the national implementation of child rights in collaboration with other sector ministries such as health and education. In this regard a coordinating mechanism for child rights promotion and monitoring has been established at the Ministry, namely the Child Rights Bureau.

In 1998 Suriname entered into a five year (1998 – 2002) Program of Cooperation with UNICEF. Within this cooperation two major programs are being implemented by the Ministry of social Affairs with technical and finan

cial support of UNICEF: Child Rights Promotion (CRP) and Social Investment, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (SIPME).

## Strategies/Successful programs

A national plan of action on commercial sexual exploitation has not been drafted.

Despite the above-mentioned, the Government acknowledges and underscores the high priority of child protection against all forms of violence and has provided support to NGOs and private institutions to develop and improve their services in this regard. Unfortunately, the Government has endured major budget costs, which had repercussions for securing sufficient financial and human resource support for programs aimed at the prevention and treatment of child abuse. Within the Government, the Ministry for Social Affairs and Housing is responsible for social youth protection measures. There is a special division where social workers provide assistance for children and their family who are in a socially deprived situation, but this division does not handle cases of abuse. Traditional views within the Government with regard to the content of social services still include an unwritten code of non-direct-interference in family-related matters, which is possibly the reason why family counseling has not been institutionalized. Social workers from the Government refer clients with family problems to NGOs and private institutions, in spite of the fact that several of the workers are able to provide help where needed because they received counseling training.

These trainings were since the mid-90s given by, e.g. the Foundation for Human/Child Development, Stop Violence Against Women Foundation and the Women's Rights Center.

There are various non-governmental organizations which are explicitly or implicitly active in the field of child abuse: Foundation Maxi Linder (commercial sex); Foundation for the Child, Foundation for Human/Child Development, Foundation Stop Violence against Women, and the Domestic Violence Network (consisting of various Government and Non-Government organizations). The Youth Department of the Police in cooperation with these NGOs handles most cases of child rights violations that are reported. Within the Foundation for the Child, there is a crisis center that provides care for the child after a complaint has been filed. Also, medical guidance is provided. In some cases counseling services are provided to the abused child, its abuser and other family members so as to resolve problems and to re-establish family relationship. The organizations investigate complaints and then report the results to the proper authorities.

As a result of the awareness raising campaigns held, the society has become more alert and responsive to cases of child abuse, which has led to an increased reporting. In many cases the governmental and non-governmental organizations are underresourced to respond adequately to the reported cases of child neglect or abuse. In general these cases are brought to the attention of organizations or authorities by:

- Teachers
- Religious organizations
- Parents
- Health workers
- People trained to detect abused children
- Social workers

Legal and other services for abused and neglected children are provided by:

- Youth Police – Ministry of Justice and Police
- Foundation for the Child
- Foundation Tamara
- Koela (crisis center for boys)

- Emmaus (crisis center for neglected children)
- Medical Pedagogical Bureau within the Ministry of Health

The Foundation for the Child and some other NGOs have also been active in community awareness raising activities over the past years, with partly government support. This support covered financial subventions and lending personnel (civil servants). In 1999 the Gender Bureau, a division of the Ministry of Home Affairs, initiated the Domestic Violence Network in order to achieve a comprehensive national effort to identify, treat, and prevent all types of domestic abuse, including child abuse. Relevant Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations have been invited to participate in this network. Key objectives are to evaluate and improve inter-agency collaboration, to avoid duplication, and to provide further training for key partners in this process.

In spite of all efforts made to reduce child abuse, whether physical or sexual, there are alarming signs of increased reporting. This maybe partly attributable to the increased awareness in society, and among children, as a result of intensive public awareness raising campaigns and increased service delivery in this regard. Nevertheless, the increase is highly concerning and receives special attention from the authorities. In the past 5 years, the Foundation for the Child registered an increase of over 100% in cases of sexual abuse of children. In 1995, the Foundation had registered 50 children, while end of 2000 this was more than 100. The Crisis Center for Sexually Abused Children operated by the Foundation for the Child started functioning in 1993 and has lately been providing services to an average of 100 child victims of sexual, physical or other types of abuse annually. The Foundation observed a trend that, except among girls in the age of 3 to 16 years, sexual abuse was increasingly victimizing babies and disabled children. In general, 95% of the abusers were

known to the children, which was confirmed by police statistics. Because of the alarming reports, the Youth Affairs Department of Police immediately intensified its education programs for children in school and through the media, as a result of which more cases were reported by children.

The Foundation for Human Development has as its goal to enhance and promote the optimal development and well-being of children in Suriname and to initiate, encourage, assess and guide activities in Suriname aimed at children and youth in Suriname. The Bureau for Child Development (BKO by its Dutch acronym) was established as the working arm of the Foundation, while the Foundation also operated a Crisis Center with Government support between 1991 and 1993, that was, however, closed due to internal problems (it was immediately followed up by the in 1993 established Crisis Center for Sexually Abused Children).

BKO pioneered interventions to increase community awareness and develop and implement strategies to reduce, identify and prevent child abuse in the family and in the community. In 1994 the collaboration between the Foundation and the Government was formalized in a Letter of Agreement in which the Government pledged to provide support to the Foundation for the implementation of activities which have been approved by the Government. The Letter of Agreement mentions in general activities towards enhanced development and well-being of children and youth, and specifically community education, training, guidance, and support to children in crisis situations.

Within this context the Bureau for Child Development (BKO), as the working arm of the Foundation for Human Development, developed and provided training for key groups in the community, including police, the Department of Justice and health workers. Intensive community education activities were carried out in order to sensitize the community in this

regard. The training developed by BKO has been institutionalized and has become a standard component of the training program for police cadets.

Awareness campaigns and other activities of the Foundation have resulted in increased reporting, reason why the BKO Foundation is now severely understaffed and under resourced to adequately process all cases.

Among the many BKO activities conducted between 1995 and 2000, the following stood out:

- Promotion of CRC on different occasions (workshops, seminars), training of children's groups on the content of CRC, organizing thematic discussions on legal issues, intermediation in cases of violations to child rights.
- Formulation of the NGO report on CRC that was submitted to the UN Committee.
- Implementation of various surveys on the situation of children and violations of their rights in the context of international conventions: the quality of preschools, situation of street children, 3 surveys on the situation of children in prison, assessment of the situation of children in day care centers.
- The surveys resulted in a number of BKO actions: trainings for volunteers and services providers on "Signalizing Child Abuse", the establishment of a BKO division (30 volunteers) in the rural District of Nickerie, counseling training for social workers in Nickerie, and training of child minders (upgrading home-based day care facilities for children).
- BKO's participation in several national commissions, committees and meetings.
- BKO has recently developed a training manual on child abuse, of which the reproduction and dissemination will be supported by PAHO.

The **Foundation for Help to Victims** was established with the goal to provide emotional,

social and financial support to victims of crime. The reason for the establishment of the Foundation for Help to Victims was that in the current court system the focus was on the offender, with little attention for the victim. Due to lack of funds and human resources the Foundation currently operates on voluntary basis, mainly in the area of community sensitization and education.

Like other NGOs in Suriname, the abovementioned foundations face many challenges. The current economic crisis and the brain drain have significantly compromised the Government's capacity to provide leadership and financial support to NGOs. Due to the severe inflation, the significance of subventions provided by the Government has gradually decreased. NGOs are now forced to actively identify and compete for additional funds. Other challenges include poor collaboration and rivalry between NGOs, lack of qualified staff and limited access to private funds.

To monitor the implementation of all the aspects laid down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a Child Rights Bureau was operationalized on June 25, 2001. This Bureau is a working arm of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

In regard to the CRC, two optional protocols from which one regards the exploitation of children is being reviewed for possible signing. An inventory is being made on the national legislation concerning child abuse & exploitation to review the conformity with the optional protocol.

Other initiatives regarding the exploitation and abuse of children are:

-A research in the area of commercial sexual exploitation of children has been done by the NGO Maxi Linder with support from the Government and UNICEF. The purpose of the research was to determine whether commercial sex workers involve their children in sex work. The study indicated that many of the sex workers do involve their children in commer-

cial sex work. In cases where commercial sex workers were found to involve their children in sex work, further study was conducted in order to determine how the children were involved and reasons for the children's involvement. Children often participate as a result of financial need, or as a result of threat of violence.

The report also concluded that current shelters must be educated or more informed of the situation of these children, or alternative shelters or social solutions must be developed.

-As a result of this study, the foundation Maxi Linder has taken further initiative to develop an awareness-raising campaign. They will be presenting the data to several local agencies to begin discussing a strategy for dealing with the issue. They will also developed TV and Radio spots to raise the public's awareness with support from the Government and UNICEF.

- In addition to the awareness campaign, Maxi Linder is increasing their networking activities so that they can get a better understanding of the issues surrounding this problem and of the needs of the children. They have received support from the UN Volunteer program. Now they have a National United Nations Volunteer placed at Maxi Linder who will be working with the National Network to Eradicate Violence Against Women in Households Including Battered Children as part of her duties here.

-Maxi Linder is also in the process of trying to get funding to expand its Alternative Income Generating programs so that they can improve their ability to train at-risk youth. These programs are currently designed to give commercial sex workers skills that will provide alternative sources of income, thereby reducing the threat of exploitation. They hope to be able to provide similar programs to youth who are similarly at-risk of being exploited.

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- As result of the outcome of the survey done by Maxi Linder the Child Rights Bureau initiated the establishment of a Child Abuse Network that will be formally installed this month (November 2001).

- In addition, an assessment is being executed the current status of practice and legislation regarding reporting of suspected child abuse in Suriname.

- CNSP (Children in Need of Special Protection)

In Suriname there are about a hundred of institutions that deal with children in need of special protection . The Ministry of Social Affairs started in May 1999 with the development of a CNSP monitoring system with technical support from UNICEF.

The categories are: children in institutions, children in conflict with the law, children with disabilities and **abused and neglected children**.

These institutions provide specific data about above-mentioned children so that the government and all relevant actors get insight into the situation of these children.

This data will be used by the government to take specific measures to improve the situation of the children. A pilot phase with 12 institutions has been carried out. This will lead to report to be generated periodically.

- CIMS (Child Indicators Monitoring System): main objective is to institute and strengthen a system of regular monitoring of indicators relevant to the well-being of children and their families.

### **Beneficiaries**

These programs/projects make a positive contribution to data gathering regarding services, legislation, prevalence and nature of child prostitution.

Another major result is the establishment of a network, which will improve effective utilization of limited resources for this target group.

### **Mechanism**

Funds were obtained from the Government's budget and also international donors, namely UNICEF.

### **Comments**

The Stockholm agenda serves as a guiding mechanism for action in this area, since it provides specific objectives and actions for countries. Much remains to be done in Suriname, but the Government is committed to children and to the protection of child victims, within the scope of their limited resources.

### **Obstacles**

Limited institutional capacity both on Government and NGO level. Lack of specialized and trained personnel, lack of community awareness and lack of appropriated legislation to protect children in this respect.

### **Identification**

#### Reasons for involving children in CSW

The Sex Workers were able to describe many reasons for involving their children in Commercial Sex Work (CSW). Several accounts below are taken directly from the questionnaires:

1. Most cited money (or lack thereof) as reason for involving children in sex work. Because clients were found to pay more for sex with children, the temptation to involve them in sex work is very strong
2. Some women allowed a neighbor to have sex with their child to cover the utilities/rent. Often the mothers found themselves with no food, no electricity, or no water.

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3. "Business is slow": (clients no longer want to be with aging mother) and clients offered a lot more money for a child. One mother sold her 8 year old daughter because clients were no longer interested in her (quite a few expressed anger and hurt that clients no longer found them desirable).
4. In many cases, the Commercial Sex Work (CSW) stated that it was the partner's idea to increase income. The Commercial Sex Work (CSW) generally denied involvement in any part of the decision making.
5. The pimp/concubine/father sold children (to friends or at gold mine) without the permission or knowledge of the Commercial Sex Workers (CSW).
6. "The husband did it": Several of the Bush Negro men believed that the girls should have sex as soon as they menstruate.
7. Several women stated that "they have to learn the facts of life", or they "have to learn to be independent".
8. Some of the mothers deny encouraging (or influencing) their children to go into sex work, they cite that it just "happened".
9. Some Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) were threatened and were unable or afraid to try and stop their abusive and controlling partners or family members (usually male) from forcing their children into sex work.

was made about feeling bad for forcing their child to do the sex work. Conversely, there were many Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) who expressed profound regret, sadness, and guilt for forcing their children into sex work. The Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) also felt great deal of resentment and distrust at the government for not helping them, and most feel there is no way the Government would help.

The Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) were asked about how they felt when they forced their child into sex work. Several spoke only about their own disappointment at no longer being the one to attract the client. No mention