

Mark Vogt,
director of War Child:

'Looking at new effects in a structured way'

Since 1995 War Child has been committed to improving the living conditions and prospects for children in (former) war zones. Education, participation, psychosocial development and child rights are the crux of the policy. Last year War Child reached almost 900,000 children on three continents, with programmes running in South America (Colombia), Africa (including Sudan and Uganda) and the Middle East (including Afghanistan). 'We work with people – children and adults – in villages and refugee camps, that live in very difficult conditions and perilous surroundings,' Mark Vogt, director of War Child, says.



'In 2006 we cooperated with Orange (Orange Netherlands has become part of T-Mobile Netherlands) on a pilot study in Uganda: "ICT in Education for Peace", how to use ICT and media for programmes and boost their results. Creativity and participation are key to our policy. We always work together with the local population – their direct involvement and input make the work sustainable. And creatively, because you have direct contact with the child; from drawing together to making exhibitions and putting on performances. We work a lot with music and theatre.

'We asked the refugees in camps in Northern Uganda what War Child could do for them, how we could improve their lot? The answer was to share their story with other Ugandans, young people from other areas of the country. By bringing these young people together online, they are able to swap experiences from their worlds and, moreover, they become motivated to do more with technology. In short, everything that contributes to (self)confidence; a life without fear, that's what it's about.

'The surprising result of the pilot was that the side effects had a much greater impact than we had imagined, like less crime and higher educational participation. The local community responded with real enthusiasm and the programme had significant pulling power. Parents began to give priority to their children; conditions became safer, social structures stronger, all facilitated by a bit of ICT. So we asked ourselves how we should take this further. TNO identified the ICT resources, media or combinations of media that could work, also in other countries and in cooperation with other organisations. It was a wonderful experience to take a structured look at new effects together with TNO and with a focus on technology.'

RADIO

'What has been a personal surprise in the TNO study is that radio, as a relatively old medium, can work in a really innovative way in some conflict zones. Radio seems to be somewhat outmoded but also for young Dutch people it is a popular medium. In the countries where we work there is still a world to be conquered. Getting young people to make their own radios can be an extremely powerful way of reaching other young people. You also boost the power of the medium by combining it with other resources, like text messaging. In Africa the mobile phone is sometimes much more

significant than we in Europe sometimes believe.

'Another example: in Sierra Leone we let children tell their own stories on a stage, using a megaphone. What would happen if we were to replace the megaphone with a radio? The reach would expand exponentially. Ultimately, it is the children with whom we work that are the only guarantee of a peaceful future in the place we work, so investment in them can never be enough.'

EMPHASISING CO-OWNERSHIP

'A major sequel project is waiting to unfold, one that also involves TNO. We want to take TNO's recommendations with us to other countries and make use of the experience TNO has with implementing the technical features. In addition, the pilot helped us enormously in refining our new strategy and getting it operational, a process in which the consulting agency McKinsey helped us for two months free of charge. Their advice was to channel our ambition and also seek other resources and parties. In aid as well as in technology, co-ownership must be emphasised. Not, therefore, will we be turning this or that on its head but what are we going to do, all of us together? As an organisation you are, by definition, inadequately equipped to do everything yourself. You must involve other parties – politics, business, local bodies. Cooperation with TNO has made that crystal clear. You want to look beyond, you can look beyond and you have to continue looking beyond. It is a route we will continue to take with TNO for while anyway.'



The TNO expertise

Matthijs Leendertse, research consultant

'At the War Child headquarters in Amsterdam we held four workshops with War Child, external experts and different country managers to explore the practicable ICT solutions and the possibilities War Child has at its disposal. We looked at all kinds of ICT and media tools. For the five most promising we carried out an evidence-based study to determine their effectiveness for the War Child objectives. These tools were radio, voice services, crowd sourcing, text messaging services and online communities. We also looked at how combinations of these tools could reinforce each other and whether operate in a in the areas where War Child is active.'

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The client

War Child Netherlands was founded in 1995 by Willemijn Verloop, with the aim of improving the psychosocial welfare of children in war zones through creative activities, including a considerable amount of – though not exclusively – music. Since 1998 the Dutch pop artist Marco Borsato has been the War Child ambassador. Currently War Child in is working in twelve countries. The organisation specialises in psychosocial methodology development but educative activities, peace building and policy influence have become part of the work of War Child. The headquarters in Amsterdam employs 52 staff and volunteers, with 345 largely local staff in the project countries. In carrying out its policy War Child works with more than 70 local partner organisations. In 2008 War Child was awarded the Freedom From Fear Award of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute.