

war-affected and data from the UN system, particularly from UNICEF. Early this month, we of the Center for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE) with the support of UNICEF, Liberia organized a National Youth Workshop on War-Affected Children. At the workshop, children were asked the question, "who are war-affected children?" Here are some of their responses: "War affected children are:

children who go without food because of war; children whose parents have been killed; children whose properties have been looted; children who witnessed horrible killings; children who disrespect older people; children whose minds are disturbed and cannot do their school work well; children who are too old for their grades; children who became parents before their time; children who took part in war as fighters; children who engage in prostitution; children who do not receive proper education; girls who have been raped.

Examining the children's responses against data on the state of the Africa's children as provided by UNICEF in the State of the World's Children report, one finds a general pattern of enormous deprivation, tragic neglect and systematic denial of rights affecting all the children of Africa, in some cases, blurring the distinction between countries that have suffered violent conflicts and those that have not. Here are some examples from the data with respect to the state of West African children.

Mortality and Health

Under 5 Mortality

A brief examination of the record for West Africa shows that in the area of human survival, the under 5 mortality rate among ECOWAS countries is among the highest in the world. Five of the 10 countries with the highest under 5 mortality rates in the world are members of ECOWAS and all ECOWAS countries are among the 30 per cent of the countries of the world with the highest under 5 mortality rates. The stunning revelation is that this situation is not new; it is not the result of current wave of conflicts or the economic down-swing of the decade of the 1980s. According to UNICEF, from 1960 to 1980 the under 5 mortality rate in West African countries averaged 186 per 1000 with an annual average rate of reduction of a measly 1.3 per cent over those two decades. Since 1980, the average rate of reduction has also been negligible except in a very few cases. In half of the ECOWAS countries the annual rate of reduction has remained stagnant or declined. Similarly maternal mortality rate has remained unacceptably high. Estimates of 1990 in some ECOWAS countries put it as high as 1,800 and 1,600 per 100,000 births. Liberia's pre-war estimate of 560 has almost doubled since the civil war, standing today at 901 in Monrovia alone.