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AFRICA/SIERRA LEONE - Thousands of children are working in the diamond mines to survive

Koidu (Agenzia Fides) - In Sierra Leone diamonds helped fuel the civil war that plagued the country from 1991 to 2002, now they are promoting economic growth to some extent, but at the same time attract in mines thousands of children with the consequent drop out of school. Thousands, in fact, boys are engaged in digging in search of the precious stones in the mine, which is outside the town of Koidu in the Kono region. Many drop out of school because they have to maintain their families. According to the International Monetary Fund, the export of gold, diamonds and iron ore, has contributed to the growth of 21.3% of the country's economy, but this situation has not yet given any benefit to the majority of Sierra Leoneans. About 70% of children in Sierra Leone are unemployed. In many families, children are becoming the breadwinners. They are paid from 10 000 to 20 000 leones (3-6 dollars) per day and 40 000 leones when they find diamonds. In Kenema, east of the capital, and in Koidu, it is estimated there are about 3,000 small-scale miners, although there are no official figures, so there may be many more. Young people work in the mines, in open pits or on the banks of the rivers, being marginalized and excluded from early childhood education. During the civil war many children were forced to join the army, many had lost their entire families, others found their homes completely destroyed and, having no other chance to survive were found to work in the mines. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 07/12/2012)

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